SWEET WILLIAM

BY MARGUERITE · BOUVET ·

Katherine

from

Uncle Will

Aunt Laura

from Julia

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BY

MARGUERITE BOUVET

Illustrated by

HELEN AND MARGARET ARMSTRONG

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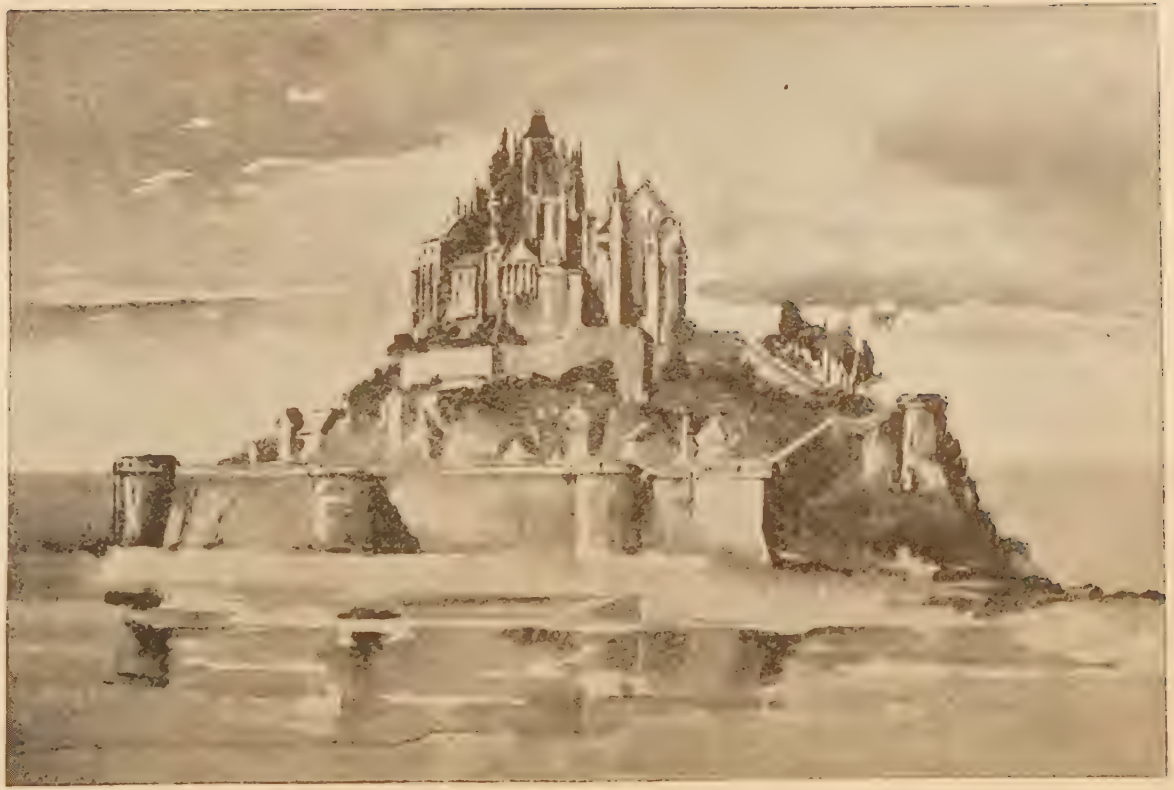

THE CASTLE ON MOUNT ST. MICHAEL.

(From a Photograph.)

SWEET WILLIAM

BY

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BY

HELEN AND MARGARET ARMSTRONG

TO

ALL THE LITTLE PEOPLE OF THIS GREAT FREE LAND,
BLESSED WITH HEAVEN'S MOST PRECIOUS GIFTS,

Love, Light, and Liberty,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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SWEET WILLIAM.

CHAPTER I.

IN the north of France is the beautiful country called Normandy, still quaint and picturesque, but different now in many ways from the Normandy of centuries ago. At the time when all that I am going to tell you in my little story took place, there stood on the great rock Mount St. Michael a strong castle such as the early Normans were fond of building. It was a beautiful old place,—beautiful in its strength and in its loneliness. It was full of those great dungeons the very thought of which fills us with dread even to-day. Its great towers rose high against the heavens, overlooking for many miles the blue waters of the channel. Its many turrets and thick walls of stone, gray with

centuries; its wonderful drawbridge, and array of high battlements. — all went to show that it had been reared at a time when men were thus obliged to protect themselves from their enemies with iron and stone so strong that nothing then known could pull down. Many of these splendid castles have been destroyed in modern times; but even their ruins have a strange charm for us when we think of the strength and the time it took to build them, and of the wonderful and great people who lived in them, and of the many strange things that took place in some of them.

Mount St. Michael was not only strongly fortified, but it was well guarded by nature. Its rocky base, plunged deep into the sea, echoed night and day to the sound of the lapping waves; and save for a few peasants' huts that clustered at the foot of the promontory, the country beyond it stretched away into an almost endless forest. It was altogether a grand and lonely place; and we do not wonder that the good people of Normandy, who knew all about its great dungeon-towers, and the captives who had been brought and kept there, — some of them for years, — we do not wonder, indeed, that they came to look upon Mount St. Michael with more dread than admiration.

But perhaps this fine old castle seemed all the more fearful to them because they knew that in it there lived a man who was proud and wicked, — a man who delighted in nothing so much as in doing evil, whose greatest pleasure was in the horrors and cruelties of war, and whose only wish was to be dreaded. This man, much as the people feared and disliked him, called himself the Duke of Normandy; and so he was, in name, though he spent but little of his time in that country, and cared still less for the good of the people whom he was supposed to rule. When he was not off on some fighting expedition, he much preferred being in France, where the king, whose vassal he was, and who was a spirited and handsome youth, led a life of excitement and gayety. Duke William liked to be with his king, not that he had any real love for him, but because he liked to be thought one of the great men of the court, and because he hoped some day to gain for himself something more than the crippled and insignificant duchy of Normandy. It was not so great a thing as it once had been, to be the Duke of Normandy; for Normandy was then but a small province of France, and there were plenty of other duchies in the kingdom that were a deal more important. But the good people still liked to call their ruler the

Duke of Normandy, and they were given that privilege; and whenever they happened to have a good duke over them, they always loved and respected and admired him.

Now, in the old gray castle on Mount St. Michael, there lived too a brother of Duke William, whose name was Geoffrey. This brother was younger and handsomer and much more amiable than William; and as he happened to have been born in Normandy, the people loved him as one of themselves, and would have preferred him for their duke had they had any choice in the matter. William knew this only too well, and for that reason had always been jealous of his young brother. Then, too, Geoffrey was gifted with so much spirit and beauty, and had withal such a gracious way of making every one love him; and that was reason enough why William should hate him.

When this young brother grew to be a man, and the crafty William could no longer keep him from going about and making friends for himself, he sailed away to France to pay homage to his king and see the world. Geoffrey had never been outside of Normandy in all his life before; and France, with its beautiful cities and gay people, seemed wonderful to him. It was far better than hunting

in the forest, to spend one's days in the society of brilliant people, to witness for the first time the splendid tournaments with their games and tilting, and indeed to enjoy all the queer amusements which the gentlemen of those days seemed to delight in.

But by far the most agreeable thing he did was to lose his heart to a beautiful and lovely lady whom he happened to see at the court one day; and being a young and impulsive lover, his love grew so very fast and so very strong that he could think of nothing better than marrying this sweet lady, and taking her home to Mount St. Michael to live with him and make him happy. A lonely place, indeed, to bring a young bride to, — that old gray castle with its dismal towers and gloomy walls, where no love nor happiness had been for many a long year, and where none would welcome her but a dreadful brother whose grim and sullen look was enough to frighten one much braver than the timid lady. The good people of the castle shook their heads sorrowfully when they heard of it, and said it would go ill with Geoffrey and his young wife, and that no good would come of it for any one. But these two young people were so happy and light-hearted in their love that they had no such forebodings. They loved each

other so much that nothing in all the world, not even the gray walls of Mount St. Michael, could seem gloomy to them if they were together.

Now, Duke William had never loved any lady well enough to think of marrying her, and though he was much older than Geoffrey, he was still living a lonely and selfish life; and he could hardly bear to see his young brother so hopeful and happy. His wicked brain at once began to think of some way by which he could at least seem as fortunate as his brother. Then he bethought himself that some day Geoffrey's fair lady might bring him a little son who would be heir to the crown and lands of Normandy, since he himself had no children; and this thought disturbed Duke William more than any other.

He hated to think that his title and possessions would have to pass over to the child of the brother he did not love; and so, foolish and hopeless a task as it would seem, he too set out in search of a wife. It would have been a wonder if such a grim and terrible person as Duke William could possibly have won the love of any gentle lady; but in those times a lady's heart went for very little in such matters, and it so happened that the Duke made friends with another stern old nobleman, whose pretty daugh-

"The ladies of those days were all beautiful and [illegible]"

ter married him because she could not well help herself. And she, too, was beautiful and lovely; for the ladies of those days were all beautiful and lovely, you know. She had a sweet, girlish face, and dark, tender eyes that no one could help loving; and Duke William was very proud of her. He had her portrait painted by a great artist, and it was hung in the Great Hall of the castle, where every one might see how beautiful she was. Indeed, it was supposed that even the heartless old duke, who had never known what it was to love any one in all his life, might in time have grown fond of this gentle creature if he had not had so many other things on his mind. He was, however, so pleased with his success and so proud of his achievement that he remained in good spirits for some time.

Everything seemed peaceful and lovely at Mount St. Michael, and the good people of the castle began to think that they had not prophesied aright, and that perhaps these two gentle ladies might be bringing with them a new life of love and union. Then they remembered that his lordship had not once indulged in one of his terrible fits of rage since his marriage with their sweet mistress; and that his shaggy brows seemed less shaggy, and his gruff voice less frightful, when he spoke with her. He had not

called his brother Geoffrey a young vagabond to his face, nor threatened, behind his back, to hang him to the highest tree of the forest; but instead he had spent much time in hunting with his hounds and his men, and this was always a sure sign that he was in a pleasant humor.

But one morning there came a summons to Duke William from the King of France, requesting him as well as all the other noblemen of Normandy to appear at the court. There were great wars going on in the south of Europe, and the young king was gathering large armies from all parts of his kingdom. William and Geoffrey eagerly made ready for battle; for next to flying his falcon the nobleman of that time enjoyed nothing so much as a war. Duke William had fought in many battles before; but Geoffrey never. And at the very thought of war there arose in his mind the dazzling spectacle of men and horses and glittering spears, and the sound of clashing swords and roaring cannon; and his heart bounded with joy, for this meant to him, as it did to most young knights, the beginning of glory and power.

William saw his brother's eagerness, and listened to his hopeful talk about all the great things he meant to do, and he thought with bitterness, "It is

like his cursed good fortune, the sweet-faced knave, to ride past me in the fray!" but he secretly made up his mind to prevent that piece of good-luck if he could.

"A farewell look for his lady-love."

Before many suns had set, the two brothers, William and Geoffrey, were riding away from Mount St. Michael, side by side, each with a great hope in his heart, and on his face a smile and a fare-

well look for his lady-love watching him from her window.

As Duke William had feared, the young king took a great fancy to Geoffrey. He could not help admiring, as no one could, the young Norman's gay and yet manly spirit, his courtly bearing and amiable look, and the free and easy grace that prompted him to reply, when the young monarch told him how much he liked him, "And I, by my faith, sire, have never looked upon a prince who could be dearer to my heart."

And this was hardly strange, for the king himself was a gracious person, and really the only sovereign whom Geoffrey had ever beheld face to face.

One day the king took Geoffrey by the hand and said sweetly, "If thou hadst been born a woman, Geoffrey, I should have made thee Queen of France;" to which Geoffrey replied, —

"But since I was not, my lord, I am well pleased to be your Majesty's faithful servant forever."

After these pretty speeches, the two young men became fast friends, and really loved each other very much. And how hardly did this go with poor William, who had been years striving to obtain the favor which the king had given to Geoffrey in a single look! His old envy was all alive again in a moment.

"It was always so with that worthless stripling," he thought, his heart full of bitterness. "I shall have no peace while he lives. Let the saints that gave him his womanish graces look to him; he will have need of them if he stand in William of Normandy's way."

It is dreadful to think of all the wicked thoughts that will come into the minds of envious and jealous people. If they could but know how much the indulgence of these vices serves to defeat their own ends, what endless trouble and sorrow and remorse they might spare themselves! But in those days, perhaps even more than now, the world was full of just such men as Duke William, — men who cared nothing for the rights of their fellow-creatures when these stood in the way of their own ambitions, and in whose eyes even the ties of blood and kinship seemed to have no sacredness.

Geoffrey grew more popular every day, not only with the king, but with all who knew him; for he showed himself as brave in battle as he was gallant at court. Whenever a great victory was won, they had a way of celebrating it by giving splendid banquets, at which the noblemen drank quantities of wine and sang one another's praises. At these no name was cheered more repeatedly or more lov-

ingly than Geoffrey's, even by the king himself, who took the greatest pride in the valor of his faithful young vassal. And, strangely enough, Geoffrey was never spoiled by his good fortune, as men are often apt to be. On the contrary, he grew more and more lovable to every one, except to his brother William, who hated him and envied him his prosperity; and when William heard the king vow, once, to make Geoffrey the greatest man in all his kingdom, he felt that his brother was his bitterest enemy.

Strange destiny that rules even the will of kings! The young monarch was never called upon to keep his promise. Some months later Geoffrey was slain in battle. In the fulness of youth and vigor he fell, and with only Heaven to witness, by the hand of his own brother.

On that very day, in the old castle on Mount St. Michael, a little child was born to each of the brothers. Two sweet, innocent babes, all unconscious of this great trouble, saw for the first time the light of the big world, and came to take their share of its sorrows and its joys. These were Sweet William and the little Lady Constance.

CHAPTER II.

EAR children, do you ever wonder how there can be so much sin and wrong and suffering in God's world? It is a question that millions of men have pondered. We even ask how, being so infinitely good himself, God can have any knowledge or consciousness of what is so unlike him. But one thing at least we know, and that is that sin is its own destroyer, — that it must kill joy and peace and rest, before itself can die; that men must pay for every wrong of heart or brain or hand by cruel and yet merciful suffering, for this is the law of a just Creator.

Duke William met with a share of his punishment, some weeks later, when he returned to Mount St. Michael. His beautiful young wife, of whom he was so proud, and in whom he had cherished so many

hopes, had died, leaving her little child in the arms of strange women. This dreadful blow Duke William had never dreamed of. He could not believe that he was left alone once more, — that the fair young creature, the only being who had ever appealed to his love, had been rudely snatched from him by a power greater and stronger than himself. It was a judgment upon him, but it did not bring him to repentance. He had done too many secret wicked things to grow suddenly submissive. On the contrary, his rebellious heart was wild with anger and disappointment, and he raged furiously for several days, so that no one dared go near him; and his servants, who had seen him behave in this way before, knew that some dark trouble was brooding, and they almost hoped that he would starve or fret himself to death. But he did not. Vicious people usually stay to be a plague to every one in this world; but we trust they are left, in order to reap some day the fruit of all their misdeeds.

Oh, what dreadful days those were at Mount St. Michael, with that savage old duke giving way to disappointment like some mad thing; and the people all sorrowing over their beloved Geoffrey, and for his sweet young wife, who would not be comforted, not even with the tender little one in her arms! It

seemed as if all the sunshine in the world was forever hidden behind the dark cloud that now hung over Mount St. Michael.

At last when Duke William had worn himself out with cursing his wretched lot, he roused himself, and called for his trusty servant Francis, — a good and faithful man, who knew his master's hard ways and did not approve of them.

"My brother has left a child?" asked the Duke, with a wicked light in his eye.

"Yes, my lord," returned Francis.

"That child," muttered Duke William between his teeth, — "that child must not grow up before me, do you hear?"

"And I pray, sir, what is your wish?" asked the good servant, with fear.

"My wish? You treacherous knave! how dare you ask? Am I like to have *that* villain's child ever before me, burning my very eyes out of their sockets?"

"My lord, my lord," exclaimed Francis, "your brain is maddened with grief. What fear need you have of a weakly babe, scarce out of its mother's arms?"

"I have no fear of the child, fool! I hate it," cried the Duke, fiercely. — "I hate it! To the tower with

it, and let me never look upon its face! In the tower it shall live, if live it must. Go, and come not again before me till this is done!"

What was it crazing this wretched man? Was it grief or remorse struggling at his heart? Ah no, it was the fear of vengeance; it was the thought of the unnatural deed he had committed that made him, a strong man, stand in dread of a helpless babe. That little child might wear its father's face, might look at him with its father's eyes, might some day know and avenge its father's wrong. He wished it dead; but he could not take its life without exposing himself and his wickedness, and thus drawing suspicion and trouble down upon his own head. He wished the child out of his sight, and yet he dared not let it go beyond his power, lest some time the opportunity might come for doing away with it, and the victim would not be there. There was nothing left him but the tower, the great dungeon-tower at the farthest point of Mount St. Michael, where more dangerous enemies had languished and at last perished; and he could find no rest till he knew that his brother's child was there, safely out of his way.

And so the sorrowful news was carried to the weeping young mother, not only that her beloved

lord was slain, but that her little one — all that she had left of him to love — was to be taken from her and cast into a dungeon.

"And what has my little child done to offend my lord?" cried the poor lady. "Oh, good Mathilde, good Lasette," she said to her women around her, "I do entreat you, beg the Duke, my brother, to spare me! Take me to him, that I may plead with him, and stay his displeasure!"

But Mathilde, the good nurse who had lived at the castle all her life, and who knew that Duke William never spared or pardoned any one, told her lady how fruitless her efforts would be, — that the Duke was a hard man; that something must have gone wrong between the two brothers, although no one seemed to know what; and that William was taking his revenge, as he never failed to do. Then she implored the young mother to flee from the Duke's anger, to leave the castle and return to her own people in France. She promised to love and guard the tender babe, and to watch over it as if it were her own, until help could be brought to them. For the love they all bore Geoffrey, the little one would be saved from harm and yet made happy by the good castle-folk. And after many tearful promises, the gentle lady was taken away by some faithful Nor-

mans, to await in their humble dwelling the ship that would bear her from Mount St. Michael and Normandy forever.

What the great trouble was, no one knew and no one dared to ask; but the news went flying swiftly through the castle, that Duke William was very angry with his dead brother, and that Geoffrey's little child was to bear the burden of my lord's wrath. They had loved Geoffrey so much that their brave hearts rebelled at this cowardly deed. They would gladly have disobeyed William, had they dared; but that would have been a dangerous thing, and so they could only hate him more than they had ever done.

And Francis's heart was very heavy that day when he went to the great dungeon, to make ready for the innocent little captive.

"My lord is a cruel master," said he to old Guilbert, the tower-keeper. "I would as lief serve the Evil One himself as Duke William in this thing."

"I would rather think of turning the bolts on my own mother than on my lord Geoffrey's helpless babe," returned Guilbert, with a sigh.

"The blackest villain could not look upon the tender little lamb without feeling his stony heart melt with love and pity," said Francis. "Would to Heaven the cruel duke had fallen in battle instead of

his brother! Mount St. Michael and the world had been better off."

"Do not grieve yourself too much for the babe, Francis. My lord never visits the Great Tower, as you know, and I will see to it that the little one fares as well here as any one at the castle," returned the good Guilbert. "A little plant needs but little water; but it shall have that, if my old bones go to pay for it."

"You're a brave fellow, Guilbert. The Holy Mother keep your old bones a little longer! A dungeon is a sorry place for a babe; but it might have fared worse for a keeper."

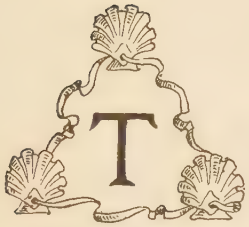
"Aye, aye," exclaimed Guilbert, "I've known even babes, the greater pity, to fare worse than this one shall."

That night in the stately bed-chamber of the castle, where the tall candles cast their flickering lights upon the gorgeous tapestries, and where peace and stillness reigned unbroken, the twin babes lay slumbering side by side, while Mathilde and Lasette bent over them with sad and anxious faces.

Then one was left in the soft, rich laces of its white cradle, to be tenderly cared for and served by many good women, to grow up in the midst of wealth and luxury; and the other was borne away to the

dreary tower, with its bare, gray walls and scanty stream of light, where no sunshine ever came to chase away the still lingering memory of the many wretched ones who had known its solitude. Yet there the infant William slept on as sweetly and peacefully as if he had been upon his mother's breast, never dreaming of the great change that had just come into his little life; and the good nurse Mathilde, who was to share his captivity during his babyhood, wept and prayed over him as the great bell of the abbey tolled out the hours in the midnight silence.

CHAPTER III.



HE Great Tower, where the baby William was to grow up and live, was as far away and isolated from the castle as Mount St. Michael itself seemed from the rest of the world. From one of its long, narrow windows nothing could be seen but the quiet sea, rippling away into a thousand little blue waves, till water and sky seemed to blend all in one. From the other, one saw the distant forest, so deep, black, and mysterious; and nearer, the quaint little peasant-huts, almost buried in the gray rock of the mount, vine-grown and gloomy, with here and there a lonely goat grazing at their door.

Mathilde, who beheld the sad outlook in the gray light of the morning, thought and almost hoped that the little prisoner would never live to know his misery.

But in the mean while the good nurse had thought to surround his little cradle with all the simple

comforts that lay in her power to bring. And little William, though brought up in a tower, was as tenderly and lovingly reared as his twin-cousin at the great castle. He was fed on the sweetest and richest of milk, and had as many old-time lullabies sung to him as any baby in Normandy. Every one thought of him and loved and pitied him, as no kind people could well help doing; and every one tried in some way to soothe his sad little lot. He was the unconscious subject of many anxious thoughts and earnest prayers; and as if those humble petitions were heard above, the babe grew daily in health and strength. In spite of his unnatural surroundings, baby William learned to smile and coo very early, and possessed all the pretty winning ways of more fortunate babies. His nurse, who at first hoped he would not live long for his own sake, soon began to hope that he would for hers. She grew so fond of him that he was hardly ever out of her arms; and she would look at him and fondle him and sing to him as lovingly and foolishly as any young mother.

And Guilbert, who had been cautioned at the peril of his head to keep the key well turned on this dangerous little captive, took the greatest interest in him, and was more often found playing with him than on duty. The good fellow had kept watch over

THE BABY WILLIAM.

many unhappy prisoners in his younger and braver days; but he could not remember ever having had one who loved and trusted him like little William, or who seemed so contented to remain in his custody. Nothing was so amusing to baby as to have his blue ribbon leading-strings slipped under his little arms, and to be led all around the tower-chamber by the good Guilbert. And by the time William was a year old, the good old friend had taught him to walk as straight as any little nobleman in Normandy. Besides, he could say a number of sweet old Norman words, and this greatly delighted his nurse Mathilde.

Very soon the baby William grew to be a boy; and the boy William was even more lovable than the baby had been. He kept a dear innocent little face, and he had such a sweet mouth, and such beautiful gold-brown love-locks curling all about his white neck, that he was like a picture all the while. He had dark, tender, trustful eyes, that looked up with just a shade of sadness in them, as if his childish soul drooped, without knowing it, for the want of the free air and warm sunshine. His quiet little voice was more like music than like the noisy prattle of children. I think this came of the deep stillness of the tower, which was seldom broken,

save by his nurse's own gentle tones, and where any sound, however harsh elsewhere, seemed plaintive and sweet as it echoed within those thick gray walls. Then, too, William himself was fond of sweet sounds. Nothing pleased him more than to listen to old Guilbert playing on his quaint harp and singing him to sleep in the long evenings. Little William early learned all the old melodies, and it was not long before his own baby fingers drew forth the sweetest music from the mellow old strings. He loved to sit, in the twilight, at his nurse's knee, and sing with her the cradle-songs of Normandy, his young voice and her old one blending together in strange, sweet harmony. This simple, almost lonely life had its influence upon William's childish nature. He grew up quiet, gentle, contented, loving his solitude as if it had been a blessing. And Guilbert, who could never quite understand how it was that so sweet a child should happen to bear the name of his wicked old uncle, and who declared that he had never in all his life — which had been long and eventful — seen so beautiful and lovable a boy as little William, forthwith christened him "Sweet William;" and never did a name suit its little owner better than this.

"In truth, Guilbert, you have a wise old head,"

said Nurse Mathilde, smiling and looking into her little boy's face. "You are right; he is more like the dear gentle little flower than like his heartless uncle the Duke."

"And indeed, Mathilde, I would rather he were 'Sweet William' all his life, than Duke William, if a title and crown must needs make men heartless and cruel."

"Heaven has given him only gentle virtues, my friend; and whether it please the saints to keep him here always, or to make him our Duke some day, his will never be but a kind and loving heart," rejoined Mathilde, hopefully.

"But I would rather the saints were pleased to take his sinful lordship to purgatory at once, and restore the boy to his rights. The Duke, like myself, has lived nearly long enough. It is time he were making room for a better one."

"Hush, Guilbert, hush!" cried Mathilde; "those are imprudent words. My lord would have your head and the child's, if he heard them. Has not Francis told you how he feared the boy? They say he does not sleep a night but he dreams of his brother Geoffrey or of the child. He asks sometimes if it be strong and well, and like to live longer than he, and if it resembles his brother."

"I know my lord never had any love for his brother; but why should he turn his hatred on the child, if there be not some dark work of which we know nothing? Surely he need not fear to see his brother's face in the boy; for Sweet William has no more of his father than of me. My lord Geoffrey had eyes as blue as heaven."

"Sweet William wears his mother's face," said Mathilde, turning away with a sigh.

"Ah, yes, my lord Geoffrey was a different boy," Guilbert went on dreamily. "I remember him well, as he was nearly a quarter of a century ago. I can see him now, running like a young deer in the forest, with his pack of hounds chasing at his heels, and then coming back with his face as bright as a streak of sunlight. Ah me! and I can see him, too, riding away from Mount St. Michael to that dreadful warfare. To think it was the last time I laid my old eyes on him, — he so young and full of life, so noble and brave! Ah, Mathilde, we shall never see his like again; he was true Norman." And Guilbert drew his hand across his eyes, and fell into a sorrowful silence.

But in spite of the sad thoughts that often came to them, these two good servants almost forgot, in time, that Sweet William was their little prisoner. Even

the dingy tower became less cheerless, as the young life grew there in childlike graces and loving ways. Every one and everything seemed to know and understand his fate, and tried to lessen its sadness. Even the shy little birds that hovered along the loneliest portions of the shore came in the spring to make their nests in the green vines that hung over his window. They seemed to feel that he was a guiltless little captive; and they chirped at him in their friendliest way, and sang their earliest and sweetest songs to him.

And thus Sweet William lived almost without any knowledge of his misfortune. He loved his good nurse dearly, and she loved him; and Guilbert was to him the best of playfellows. For how should he miss the blessings of freedom which he had never known? Sun and air and his full share of the glorious light of heaven he lacked, to bring a deeper tint to the faint roses in his cheeks and greater sturdiness to his fair young body; yet quietly he bloomed, as doth a gentle flower, beneath the sunshine of love, — that fruitful blessing which a kind Providence hath ordained shall bear as freely in a dungeon as in the fairest field.

CHAPTER IV.

NOTHER babe was growing up all this while at Mount St. Michael, — a very different child, indeed, from Sweet William. In the first place, she was a little girl, with fair hair and merry blue eyes, and the happiest of little dimples forever playing about her rosebud of a mouth. She was always gay and bright and full of life, and she was so quaint and sharp that sometimes she quite astonished her nurse Lasette with her roguish little ways. Then she lived in the great splendid castle, where everything was beautiful, and where a host of servants seemed to have nothing else to do but to look after her little wants and comforts. Everything that was calculated to make a child happy at Mount St. Michael was hers. The bright flowers in the castle gardens; the lovely deer in her father's parks; the hounds and the horses, of which she was so fond; and better than all, the free pure air of the

hills, and the clear blue sky above her, and the warm sunshine, — all were hers to enjoy.

My Lady Constance, as she was always called, lacked nothing to make her the bright and sunny little creature that she was. She ruled, without knowing it, the castle and all its inmates, — even the stern old Duke, her father, who had for many years refused to see her and to love her.

You have heard enough about Duke William to know that he was a strangely heartless man. When his young wife died, and he was told that she had left him only a little daughter, he was furious. He wanted a son, of course, — a son to inherit his title and his lands, and to bear his name down through the ages. But the fates were unkind to him, — as they had always been, he said, — and had given to his brother the son that should have been his, and left him with only a girl for an heir. This was a great disappointment to him; and he showed how bitterly he resented it by never seeing Constance or inquiring after her, so that for many years she hardly knew she had a father.

Duke William spent little of his time at Mount St. Michael. Indeed, he was never there unless he had some wicked thing to hide from, or grew uneasy about the little boy in the tower, lest he might in

some way have escaped him. And when he had reassured himself, and found everything going on as usual, and saw that he had given himself all this trouble and anxiety in vain, he would find fault with everything he could, and scold the good Francis, and make himself so disagreeable that every one kept out of his way who could; and all were glad enough when he was off again.

But one day in the early summer, when my lord was returning from some glorious warfare in unusually good spirits, he saw something that surprised him.

A little girl was just emerging from one of the narrow wooded paths that led up to Mount St. Michael. She was a pretty child, with bright flowing hair; and she leaned caressingly against a beautiful and stately horse. One of her little arms was wound tenderly about his neck, and she looked into his strong noble face without a trace of fear. She was talking to him in the most earnest and loving little voice, —

"You would not be wild with me, would you, dear Roncesvalles? Jacques says you are too big and too fierce for a little maid like me; but Jacques is such a simple old soul, — he does not know the ways of little maids. I care not what he says, I will have

MY LADY CONSTANCE AND HER FRIEND RONCESVALLES.

no other horse; for there is not in all Normandy another horse as beautiful as you. I loved you the very first time I saw you, and Nurse Lasette herself says that is the best kind of love. I could not help it, Roncesvalles, — you were so tall and so white, and you held your lovely neck so well. You must forgive me, but I love you more because you are fierce and wild sometimes. I would not tell you this, if you were not always so gentle with me. I wonder what makes you so knowing. Dear, good horse, if they take you from me, I will never love any other horse." And she hid her rosy face in his long white mane.

Duke William thought he had never seen so pretty a picture. "She is beautiful, my daughter, and fair," he said to himself with pride; and he rode up where Constance and her friend were standing.

Constance was a strangely fearless child. She had never seen her father, but had heard much of him, and had gathered all sorts of queer ideas about him in her little head. Sometimes she thought he must be a kind of god, because he seemed to rule Mount St. Michael without ever being there, and because such great and powerful persons as Lasette and Francis and even old Jacques seemed to stand in such awe of him, and spoke his name only in whispers.

She had often been curious to see Duke William, for she fancied he must be a different being from any one she had ever known. She wondered if he was a huge creature like the dreadful giants Nurse Lasette had told her of. She thought that his voice would be like rumbling thunder, and might shake even the rocks of Mount St. Michael when he spoke. Still, she had never thought that she might be afraid of him. And when my lord really and truly did look down at her from his high horse, and said in quite a natural voice, "Roncesvalles is yours, my little lady, and neither Jacques nor any one else shall take him from you," she looked up at him with wide blue eyes, and said,—

"Your lordship is very good to me. I am the Lady Constance; pray, what is your lordship's name?"

"William of Normandy," replied the Duke, grimly; for it struck him oddly, perhaps unpleasantly for the first time, that his own child should not know him.

Constance was not at all intimidated. She was only a little surprised to find that her father was very human in appearance, — in fact, not so very unlike Francis, except that his eyes were blacker, and his beard longer, and his brows more wrinkled, and that he wore a wonderful coat of mail and a bright shining sword at his side. She studied him for a

little while, and then the dimples played about her small mouth again, and she said with her most engaging smile, —

"I have wished all my life to see your grace, because I have heard my nurse say that you were a great and powerful man, and that you could be fierce sometimes. And I knew that I would love you, because I love fierce people best; that is why I love Roncesvalles."

Duke William was not accustomed to have little maids tell him that he was fierce, much less that they loved him. He was quite startled for a moment, and scarcely knew what to say.

"And what know you of fierce people, and how came you to like them so well?" he said at last.

"Oh, Nurse Lasette has told me all about them; and though they do not always do what is right, I cannot help liking them. They are so strong; and sometimes they can say whether a person shall live or die. That is a great thing for a person to say, is it not?"

Duke William's black eyes glistened, and he looked fiercer than ever, as he said, —

"You have been well taught, I see, my Lady Constance."

But she did not notice the cloud that came over

his face just then. She had turned to Roncesvalles again, and was telling him of his good fortune.

"Have you heard, good horse? The Duke my father has said that you shall be mine. We will join in the great chase now, and you shall be the swiftest horse and I the best horseman among them. Tell me that you are glad, dear Roncesvalles."

The great white steed arched his beautiful neck and looked at her lovingly, and she seemed satisfied.

"Now come closer, and let me mount you, and we will show my father what good friends we are."

But the Duke quickly alighted from his own horse, and gallantly helped the little girl himself; and they rode away to the castle together, — an odd-looking pair, indeed, to those who might have seen them, — her graceful and airy little figure sitting so straight on the noble Roncesvalles speeding away between the thick trees, and her clear voice ringing out in merry laughter through the woods; while Duke William's tall and stately form followed in thoughtful silence, like a dark shadow after a bright ray of sunlight.

From that day Duke William began to be more concerned about his little daughter. In all his long and selfish life he had never had any intercourse with children. He knew little of their sweet and winning ways, and of the power which they often have even on

such hard hearts as his own; and for this reason he fell an easy prey to her artless and gentle influence. It pleased him to see that she was gifted with beauty and grace and brave courage. He was proud to find in his child the attributes which he did not possess; for these virtues never fail to exercise an influence over us, when their owner is so sweetly unconscious of them all.

Cruel as was Duke William, he was still human enough to feel the power of a loving and innocent child, the more so because this child was his own, and the only living being from whom he could claim any affection. There comes a time in every one's life, no matter how unloving and unlovable one may be, when there springs up in the heart a great and unexpected love that is worth more than all the hopes and ambitions of a lifetime. That time had come for Duke William. He did not feel this all at once; indeed, it was many months before he realized what a strong hold Constance was taking each day upon his heart. At first he had enjoyed the childish intrepidity with which she always spoke to him, admired her quaint speeches, and been much amused by her arguments with him. No one ever argued with my lord at Mount St. Michael, or disputed his word, and he found it rather a pleasing novelty. He took

especial delight in pretending to be converted to some of her views — which he found somewhat curious at times — after a long and stormy discussion, and he nearly always ended by granting her whatever she wished, no matter how eccentric or impossible her wishes might be. He was a man who loved his power more than anything else in the world, and who rarely missed a chance of showing it. He liked to think that through him a little child could rule a whole people, and in that thought he forgot that she was ruling him with the rest. It would have been a fearful thing for the people of Mount St. Michael had Constance been anything but the kind-hearted and loving child she was; for her father would as willingly have indulged her in cruel and thoughtless wishes as he did in her more amiable ones.

But a single wicked person in one family is quite enough; and Constance seemed to have inherited none of the faults which might have been expected. She was an object of love and admiration to every one at the castle. Although she was always the "Lady Constance" and her little word was law, she had a gentle, winning way of making herself obeyed, which made everybody happy to serve her. Her good nurse, Lasette, who had been with her from her

cradle, and who had striven to train her childish heart to kind and unselfish thoughts, felt, when she saw the pretty child engaged in some good work for the poor little Normans of the village, and heard her pitying their hard and unhappy lot, that her efforts had not been in vain, and that some day, perhaps, the little Constance would be the means of righting the great wrong that was done at Mount St. Michael.

In time, Duke William found no society so agreeable to him as that of his little daughter. His visits to the castle became more frequent, and his sojourns longer. He never ceased to enjoy, and indeed to marvel at, her unrestrained and childlike fondness for him. He did not understand that some people are made to love and to be loved, and that few can resist the hidden power of such natures; that a child like Constance could see no evil in others, but could rather love and magnify the little good that was in them. As for my lady, she liked nothing so well as to sit at my lord's knee and listen to the glowing accounts of the last foray, while the great fire crackled up the tall chimney, and the blazing logs lit up the darkness of the stately hall of the castle. She always kept her love for fierce and unruly people; and as his noble lordship thought it unnecessary to inform

her of all the wrong and injustice he was guilty of when off on these expeditions, she also kept her admiration for him and his great power, and grieved often that she was only "a little maid," and could never join him in all these wonderful sports.

And then my lord would sigh bitterly and think of the little boy in the tower, and wonder why that child whom he hated should have been a boy.

"If I had had a *son* like Constance," he would say to himself, "I should have been a happy man."

But he did not deserve to be a happy man, when he was the cause of so much unhappiness to others; and he never was.

Constance did not feel the disappointment so keenly. She found much consolation in her dear Roncesvalles and the favorite hounds, and in flying her pet hawk. Whenever she could, she accompanied her father in his hunts to the great forest; and indeed she had a great many more amusements than the little girls of those days were wont to have. And as she knew nothing of the little boy in the Great Tower, and had never done any but kind and lovely deeds all her life, she was a very happy little girl.

It was not long before Duke William was again called away to fight for the glory of his king and his

country; for in those troublous and ambitious times the noble gentlemen of Europe were seldom idle in that respect. But for some reason his lordship left Mount St. Michael this time with more reluctance than he had ever done. He did not like to confess, even to himself, that a little girl with a sweet, dimpled face and laughing blue eyes had alone been the means of keeping him at Mount St. Michael so long. Like all men with hard and unloving natures, he considered it an unmanly weakness to show love for any one. Still, he could not well help, and could scarcely account for, the strange new feeling he entertained for Constance. He excused himself however by saying that he was growing old, and that the pleasure of warfare was beginning to lose some of its charm for him; and that before many years more, the fireside at Mount St. Michael and Constance would be his best companions.

As he took leave of the pretty child, who clung to him and wept with undisguised sorrow at parting from him, it suddenly came over him that, after all, she was the dearest thing in the world to him. No one had ever loved him so, nor ever trusted him as she did,—not even the gentle being who had been his but a few short months. His hard heart melted for a moment. What if he fell, and should never see

her again? In a burst of feeling he caught the little girl up in his arms and kissed her, and looked at her, murmuring almost fondly, —

"How fair she is, my little daughter, my Constance!"

And then, turning to the trusty Francis, he spoke in a voice that no one had ever heard before.

"My good friend," said he, "I leave the Lady Constance in your keeping. When I am hence, remember, she rules Mount St. Michael and Normandy. In doing her bidding, you are doing mine."

These were strange words from his grace the Duke of Normandy. Francis could scarcely recall having ever been spoken to before as my lord's "good friend," or having ever received such pleasing and amiable orders. But Francis was a wise man; and though he knew it would hardly be safe for him to disregard my lord's injunctions, he could not help thinking, knowing Constance as well as he did, that my lady's views and her father's were vastly different on some points. But he promised, as he always did, to be her faithful servant, inwardly rejoicing that Constance had a good and loving little heart, and feeling sure that her wishes would be none but pleasant and easy ones to execute.

But here the good Francis was mistaken, as he

fully realized some weeks later, when my Lady Constance asserted her power at Mount St. Michael in such a way that for a time he was greatly puzzled in his own mind as to which was the harder task, — to obey my lord or to disobey my lady.

CHAPTER V.

IT was full midsummer. The air was sweet with the breath of the wild honeysuckle, and the fields were white and yellow with daisies. The tall trees swung softly beneath a clear blue sky; and an air of warmth and quiet, that should have made all things happy, rested upon Mount St. Michael. My Lady Constance was returning from a joyous canter among the hills with Roncesvalles. Her fresh cheeks were blooming with health and color, and her bright eyes glowing with a strange excitement.

"Oh, dear nurse," she cried in a distressed little voice, and throwing herself into Lasette's arms, "you cannot think what a dreadful thing I have just seen! Francis, dear good Francis, is doing such a wicked thing!"

"What is it, sweet?" asked the nurse; "what is the good Francis doing to make my little lady look so rosy?"

"I could not reach them in time, dear Lasette,— Roncesvalles was lazy and slow for the first time in his life; but I saw them as they left the courtyard through the great western gate. They were going to the Left Tower, with two noble-looking gentlemen who were bound hand and foot; and there was a sweet lady with them, with a babe in her arms, who wept and called out to them. But Francis would not listen, and he closed the gates upon her. And now he is letting them take those noble gentlemen to the great black dungeon, where they must starve and die, the lady says. Oh, Nurse, you should see the sweet babe. It is cruel to take away its father; and Francis must not do it, must he? I shall tell him he must not." And the pretty child's eyes ran over with tears, as she thought of this needless suffering.

"My Constance, perhaps there is some good reason why those gentlemen should be taken to the tower," said Nurse Lasette, soothingly, though she herself heaved a sigh and doubted her own words.

"A good reason for making people so unhappy, good nurse! I cannot think of one."

"You are still a very little girl, dear love, and you

may not understand. Tell me, how came you to know all this?"

"I saw the lady as I was crossing the courtyard, and spoke with her; and she told me that her husband and her brother were prisoners sent to Mount St. Michael to be shut up in a dungeon and die. What are prisoners, Lasette?"

"Unhappy ones who are deprived of all their freedom, and who are watched and kept in some dreary place where neither love nor comfort is."

"And must they always die?"

"Not always; though they often wish they might."

"Oh, I wish there were no dungeon towers at Mount St. Michael! Think of it, good nurse! The poor lady has walked for days across the moors only to be with them, and now they will not let her go into the tower to see them; she says she will die of grief. But Francis must not let this thing be done; he must not shut them up in that black, black tower, must he?"

Lasette longed to say no, and to ease her child's anxious little heart; but she could not. She could only take her in her arms and stroke her fair hair soothingly.

"These good men must be set free," the little girl went on. "I am sure they have done no wrong; for

they are noble and princely-looking, like my dear father himself. He would let them go if he were here. I must seek Francis and tell him so." And she bounded away with a face full of determination.

"Nay, nay, Constance!" cried Lasette, in alarm; "you can do nothing. Francis is doubtless doing what is right, and my lord your father's will. These things must happen in war, — and indeed I would there were no wars. But we can do naught but wait, and comfort the poor lady, and bid her hope for their release sometime."

"But she says they will never be pardoned, Lasette, — that they are doomed to die. It is a fearful thing. It must not happen at Mount St. Michael; and we will not let it, will we, dear nurse?"

"Ah, Constance," thought the good Lasette, "many fearful things have been done at Mount St. Michael, of which your tender little heart knows nothing. Would there were more like you! There would be less suffering and sorrow in the world."

"You do not answer me," said Constance, fearing her nurse was falling into one of those long and sad reveries which the little girl could not understand and which always troubled her. "Tell me, what are

you thinking of when your dear eyes are looking away off at nothing, like that? Are you thinking of the poor prisoners, and of how we can help them?"

"It is needless to think of that, my sweet Constance. I fear we never can."

"Oh, Nurse, we must! I will never love you again if you do not say we can." And she kissed and caressed Lasette in a way that plainly belied her words. "Come, let us go and find Francis, and I will tell him how it is, and that he must let them go before nightfall; for they have a long journey before them."

Lasette allowed herself to be led away. It was impossible to hold out long against Constance. She had such simple, childish trust in the kindliness of others that no request seemed to her too daring. She was a wise child for her years, and could often be made to recognize her wilfulness whenever her little wishes were unreasonable, — as they not unfrequently were. But she took no refusal when she felt inwardly sure that some great good for others would come of what she asked.

A great deal of talking went on with Francis, who at first laughed at my lady, and then tried to reason with her. He told her that these noble gentlemen

"What are you thinking of when your dear eyes are looking away off at nothing?"

were dangerous prisoners, and powerful enemies of the king; and that the Duke her father was doing his liege a great service by keeping them safely out of the way. But Constance could not be convinced that two such noble-looking persons could possibly be dangerous, or could in any way deserve to be locked up in a tower and made miserable. She used all her wiles on the good steward, and finally recalled her father's words to him, asking him if he were not ashamed so ill to keep his promise.

This was bewildering, and Francis hardly knew what to do. My lord would certainly be furious if he found his captives gone when he returned; my lord would be furious if he knew that Constance had been thwarted or grieved in any way; in fact, my lord was such a strange man that he would be furious whatever was done; and Francis felt, for this once only, that my Lady Constance was as hard to serve as her father.

"By the great St. Michael!" he exclaimed, "I love the little lady dearly, but I can ill spare my head at five-and-forty."

But her ladyship seemed to have no thought of this. Indeed, she went alone to visit the unfortunate prisoners and to comfort them. She assured them, in her bright and hopeful way, that Francis would not

be obstinate long, and that ere another dawn they would be on their way homeward. She did not know why they smiled so faintly, and why they seemed to take more pleasure in looking at her glowing little face and touching her fair hair than in the glad news she brought.

St. Michael was a well-known and dreaded fortress. Every one had heard of its great, deep dungeons which for centuries had scarcely been idle. Every one knew of the fierce old duke, and his love of wickedness and revenge. But every one did not know of the little girl who had lately grown up at Mount St. Michael, and in whose small person was so much power, — but whose power was love.

I cannot say whether Constance would have carried the day with Francis, or indeed what would have happened, if at this supreme moment my lord himself had not appeared; and just at the time to witness the most interesting part of the struggle between them. All the castle-folk were in a state of great excitement, of course. Such a strange thing had never been heard of at Mount St. Michael. Little girls were not wont to interfere with the affairs of the kingdom, nor to release prisoners of war. It was an extraordinary event; and every one felt it to be an anxious time, — most of all the good Francis, who afterward declared

frankly that for the first time in his life he was truly glad to see Duke William's lordly face turned toward Mount St. Michael.

And Constance was happier than she had ever been at the sight of his lordship. She knew very well that Francis would never dare to dispute with him as he had done with her, and that with such a great and powerful person as her father all things were possible.

She did not wait for the usual evening confidences around the fireside. Before my lord had fairly alighted from his horse, she had related the whole story to him in her eager, impulsive way, — pictured the distress of the young mother, praised in glowing terms the brave courage of the unhappy prisoners, and expressed her own grief that they had met with such uncourteous treatment at Mount St. Michael. There was not the shadow of a doubt in her words, as she took her father's hand and said, —

"I knew, dear father, that you would not let this thing happen at your castle. Now the gentlemen may go, and the dear lady with them, may they not?"

A terrible look came into my lord's face, — a look of mingled rage and fear. Yes, he was afraid of those simple, trustful words. — afraid lest that dear, childish

faith in him should be shaken, or perhaps lost forever; angry that he had been unconsciously trapped by her in one of his wicked designs, and caused for one moment to lose sight of his own selfish ends. Francis understood the look, more especially as it was directed to him, and freighted with terrible meaning; but Constance did not. She fancied my lord was displeased at the wrong that had been done in his absence; and she began to fear she had spoken too severely in poor Francis's behalf, and might be now calling down untold evils on his faithful head.

"My lord," she cried, looking up at him with anxious eyes, "you will pardon the good Francis; he did not understand, as we do. Let him go and release the prisoners and make them happy."

"Francis hath ill obeyed his orders, and deserves no such honorable task," replied Duke William, directing his answer to the good servant "What has the Lady Constance to do with affairs like these, or to be troubled with them?"

Francis made no protest.

"My father," returned the child, with a tender little look that was almost a caress, "the Lady Constance has troubled herself with this affair, and Francis is really not to blame. He would have hidden it all from me, but I would not let him. And,

indeed, I saw the lady myself, and she told me everything. You must see the sweet lady, dear father; and she will tell you, too, what great good men her husband and her brother are, and how innocent they are of any guilt."

"I have no wish to see the sweet lady or her noble relatives," rejoined my lord, with a grim effort at a smile. "I know the story of their innocence perhaps better than my little daughter. I only wish that she will not trouble herself with matters so much beyond her years, nor give her father cause to make her unhappy. Take," said he, turning to his servant, — "take the child away; she must hear no more."

But Constance was not to be baffled even by this first approach to a refusal.

"But I shall be very unhappy if I do not know more. Tell me, dearest father," she cried, clinging to him appealingly, "must these gentlemen die in the dungeon? Oh, I cannot think of it! It is a fearful thing to die, is it not?"

"We must all come to it, soon or late," returned my lord, dryly; "and these gentlemen will scarcely be the worse for it a hundred years hence."

"But think of their wives and their dear little children who must live on without them. I should grieve so if any one took your life; I should want to

die too." And Constance looked up at him with blue and tearful eyes.

The sight of her grief, of her tenderness for him, stayed my lord's displeasure. He laid his hand on her fair hair and stroked it gently.

"And, sir," she went on, "is it not a wicked, wicked sin to take little children's fathers from them? And would not the good St. Michael, who loves all little children, — would he not be angry with us all, if such a thing were done at Mount St. Michael?"

Duke William felt a cold stream about his heart. What memory did those clear, childish words recall to him? What was it that held him, that made him tremble, — he so strong in wickedness ever before, so immovable in his purpose, — when those trustful, innocent eyes looked straight into his. All at once there rose in his mind a strangely mingled picture of his young wife, with her sweet face and angel smile, and of the youthful brother upon whom he had looked in cold blood on that dismal battle-field. A shudder ran through his frame.

"Bring me the wine!" he cried; "my blood is cold. — Ah, Constance, Constance! that look hath made a coward of your father!" And his head dropped in silence on his breast.

He was thinking, not of the wrong he had medi-

tated, not of the sorrow he would have caused, nor of the wrath he might be calling down from heaven upon his head, — indeed, he had so long lived in total disregard of any power greater than himself that he never thought of the vengeance of a just Providence. He was thinking selfishly, as he always did, — of what he himself was in danger of losing; this trust, this admiration, this perfect childish love, which was more to him than all his hopes of former years.

He felt the little girl's hand nestle softly within his, and the spell was broken. "Go," said he to one of his attendants, — "go, release the prisoners, and say it is the Lady Constance gives them their liberty."

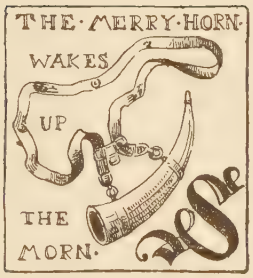
Such glad, glad words to the ears of the little Constance! Such startling news to weary, hopeless captives! And, oh, such rejoicing as there was at Mount St. Michael that night; and such praises to the good patron saint, that Duke William had at last found something to warm his hard and bitter old heart! And such secret hopes as rose in the bosoms of the good nurses for that other child, — the dear little prisoner whom every one loved, but for whom nobody dared to intercede!

Everybody was so happy, and wore such a bright and smiling face, at the thought of this first good deed of my lord's, that Duke William did not feel

quite at home in his own castle. The thought of his good deed did not impress him as favorably as it did the rest. Indeed, after having slept over his amiable resolutions, he considered them only weak and cowardly, and concluded that the genial influence of love and virtue was unfitting him for his knightly duties.

Several hours before dawn my lord left the fortress, following close upon the footsteps of the luckless noblemen, and was neither seen nor heard of for many a long day. He went, he said with a wicked smile, to see them safely on their way; but how they fared in my lord's kindly custody, or whether they ever reached the end of their journey in safety, neither my Lady Constance nor any one else at Mount St. Michael ever knew.

CHAPTER VI.



SWEET WILLIAM had no knowledge of all this. Why should he, — a little boy living away in a lonely tower, seeing no one but his good, kind nurse and his merry old keeper, who both kept from him anything that might disturb his sweet contentment? William had never heard of wars nor of captives. He did not even know that he himself was one. He did not know that there were people in the world who were doing cruel and unjust things, and spending the best part of their lives in making other people unhappy. He did not know that such a person, very nearly related to him, was living hard by at the castle, and had for long years been cherishing evil and malicious designs against his own innocent little self. But he did know that in this same great castle there lived another child who like him-

self had lost her dear young mother, — a little girl who had been born on the same day with him, and who Mathilde had said was good and beautiful. He always spoke of her as "my fair cousin Constance;" and without having ever seen her face her image was enthroned in his young heart, and he loved it in a vague and indefinite way, as one loves a fair ideal or a dear memory.

He often wondered if he would ever really see her, and be permitted to kiss her hand and do brave deeds for her sake, as cousins always did in the lovely fairy-stories his nurse told him. And she would always say, —

"Some day, Sweet William, some day you will surely live at the castle with the Lady Constance, and be happy. Oh, may the good God will that it be soon!"

"And may I then see my fair cousin every day?" William would ask; "and will she sing with me as you do, nurse, and let me play with her?"

To which Mathilde would always reply, with a kiss and a hopeful smile, "Doubtless, sweetheart, doubtless."

"And what games would please a little maid like her, do you think? Surely, 't would frighten her to hear Guilbert roar like the lion when we have our

tournaments;" for in his tender heart he was ever building very light and airy little castles for that happy time when he would go forth into the big world as other children did, and see the many strange things he had only heard of as yet, and learn much that would make him good and wise and teach him to make others happy.

Thus he and Mathilde would talk and plan for hours together, and devise a score of pleasing and impossible things for those happy days to come. And they took so much pleasure in these innocent hopes that Sweet William never wearied of his solitude. Indeed, he loved it, and would have been sorry to leave the dear old quietness of the tower, and the drowsy murmurs of the sea beneath it, and the merry chirp of the birdlings at his windows, and all the simple tokens of love in which his captivity was so skilfully concealed from him, had he suddenly been taken from them all.

He knew — for his good nurse had told him — that for some reason which he was yet too young to understand, he must live in the tower and never ask to leave it; and he never did, being blessed with a sweet spirit of submission that made his childish trust and faith all the more pathetic. He knew that his nurse loved him; and he listened to her hopeful words, and

looked forward to that strangely distant future, of which they so often spoke, much as we look forward to a glorious hereafter while still loath to leave this less lovely world.

The time came, however, when Sweet William's dreams were in part realized; but, like all of our dreams, it came about so differently from what he had fancied that it scarcely seemed to him like the thing he had been wishing for so long. A little less than a month after my lord's departure from Mount St. Michael, there was one bright morning great sport going on at the castle, in the shape of a splendid hunt to the great forest. Hounds and horses, young men and ladies, among whom the little Lady Constance was by no means the least conspicuous, were gathering for a day of merry frolic; and the whole air about Mount St. Michael trembled with the sound of their mingled voices.

By some strange hazard the hunters had taken a lonely, narrow road from the fortress, that wound around the foot of the Great Tower, and thence led miles away into the very heart of the forest. It was a road seldom taken by my lord himself in his chase; and it was almost untravelled by any human being. It was the road that led across that vast stretch of country overlooked by one of William's tower-

windows. That day the little boy sat beside this window, which he himself had named "Sweet William's Bower," because it was there he loved to sit alone, and think about all the great things he would do when he grew to be a man. It was there he dreamed all his young dreams, and wondered silently at the mystery that hung over his young life. It was there he sat at dusk and watched the little stars come peeping through the darkness, and breathed the crisp salt-breeze that wafted from the sea. He loved this outlook best, even though it was barren and unlovely, — perhaps because it was more in harmony with his dreary little life. But he did not know this: he only knew that it was the place he loved best in his quietest moods; and he felt, rather than thought, that the lonely country which no one ever crossed was his childhood, and the deep, mysterious forest beyond it, the great Some Day which Mathilde said held something hidden for him. If he sat there through the day, Guilbert never made so bold as to disturb his reveries, not even to propose the rescuing of an imaginary fair cousin from the jaws of some no less imaginary dragon, which was a favorite amusement with them both when little William felt heroically inclined. He had often said to his nurse that he knew sometime he would look out of his

Bower-window and see something pleasant. He did not know exactly when or what, but he felt it would be something that would make him happy. He begged Mathilde not to laugh at him, nor call it one of his odd little fancies; and he was so earnest in his belief that the good nurse never did.

And truly enough, on that same bright morning, when the warm sunlight streamed down from heaven like a flood, making even that desolate landscape beautiful, Sweet William from his Bower beheld the fairest vision of his dreams.

A troop of hunters were riding gayly down the road, with their hounds barking and chasing after them in great glee, their falcons perched upon their shoulders, and their cross-bows slung at their sides. Shouts of merry laughter came up from the happy throng, and the sound of the hunting-horns filled the air, and echoed loudly against the wall of the Great Tower.

Sweet William heard and saw it all. But from amid the whole company he singled out one little figure sitting erect upon a horse of spotless white. Golden ripples of hair fell all over her shoulders like a veil, and her wide-awake blue eyes sparkled with life and happiness. A cry of admiration burst from his childish lips.

"Sweet William from his Bower-window beheld the fairest vision of his dreams."

"It is Constance!" he exclaimed, starting and clasping his little hands tightly. "Look, look, Mathilde, how beautiful she is!"

It was Constance, and she was beautiful indeed. The bloom of morning and of youth was upon her cheek, and the ring of her clear voice was like the chiming of silver bells. She looked like a nodding rose upon a bed of snow, as she sat upon the great white Roncesvalles; and he, too, was beautiful, for my lady had, with her own loving hands, decked him out with garlands of marguerites that hung in stately grace around his arched neck.

"Holy Mother!" cried Mathilde, "it is the little lady herself. How did you know, sweet, that it was Constance?"

"Because she is like the Constance you have so often told me of, only a thousand times more fair. Oh, Nurse, she looks like a goodly little maid, and loving; for see how she leans over the noble horse, and seems to jest with him, and sends smiles and kisses to him withal!"

"Roncesvalles is my lady's best comrade," said the nurse.

"I would, then, that Roncesvalles and I were friends. I think, Mathilde, that angels can scarce be lovelier than my cousin Constance. Oh, tell me more

of her, dear nurse. You have not told me half enough. We should have spoken of nothing else if I had known she was so beautiful. What is she doing in this great company, and why are they riding away, away so far? Soon I shall see her no more."

Mathilde drew near to her darling, and folded her arms about him tenderly; for a sudden fear sprang up in her heart at the sight of his agitation. She tried to soothe him with kind words and to make light of his surprise; but his dark eyes had a wistful look in them, and his fair cheeks were flushed, and he spoke in a hurried, excited little voice which she had never heard before.

"They are off to the chase, I fancy, — to hunt all day in the wild woods, and come home weary and faint with their day's sport. Come sit upon my knee, sweetheart, and I will tell you what wild frolic is in a chase; and at nightfall we will watch again for them and see them bringing back their game."

But William lingered a moment longer at his window, not seeming to hear his good nurse, his eyes fixed on the galloping white steed, and his thoughts with its fair rider. In that same moment Constance, as if drawn by the power of that earnest look, turned back. Her eyes rested on the distant tower, search-

ing for something; then they wandered higher and higher till they fell at last on Sweet William's Bower and the face that looked down from it.

And that face, as Constance saw it, was the face of a little boy, — a sweet earnest face, so pure and white, framed in its wealth of rich brown curls; a face lighted up by a pair of great soft eyes that shone like two stars in the deep midnight; a face that would have been sad but for the smile that lurked in the upturned corners of his little mouth; a face that once seen, one might never forget. Constance saw it all in one look, and remembered it ever after.

"Come, dear heart, will not you hear about the hunt?" said Mathilde, drawing him gently to her side; "or must I let Guilbert tell it to you? He has a better memory, and a marvellous tongue for story-telling, has Guilbert, as you know; and I feel he could delight your ears better than I. For it is many and many a year since your old nurse has seen such sports."

"No, no, dear maman," — Sweet William always called his nurse so when he was very fond of her, — "not Guilbert this time, but you. Guilbert would make me laugh, he always does, — he is such a dear, merry soul. I would rather think now; and you know I can always think better so." And he stole one arm

about her neck, while his head rested lovingly on her shoulder.

"Well, well, let me see," said Mathilde, trying to recall something she had never witnessed. "As I said before, it is a long, long while since I was in a chase, — so long that I sometimes think I was never in one at all. And that is much more likely, for in my days little girls had milder sports; and galloping about on fiery steeds, over rocky places, and jumping deep ditches, and keeping company with fierce birds whose sharp claws and ugly beaks are enough to frighten one, was considered much too dangerous. But now — "

"Oh, were you a little girl once," asked Sweet William, incredulously, — "a little girl like my cousin Constance?"

"Yes, sure, my love, though not so fair as your sweet cousin. In truth, William, I think, with you, that my Lady Constance is more like an angel than a child, for loveliness."

"And was your hair the color of gold, like hers? It is so white, and more like silver now," said he, softly touching the locks that strayed from beneath her cap.

"Alas, no! Mine was more like the plumes of a crow; and many 's the time my heart ached with it, for my ears were sore with hearing myself called

a blackbird and a cinder-wench, and what not. I would fain have cut it off to please those who found fault with it, and to silence their tongues."

"It would have been better had you cut their tongues out for grieving you so," returned Sweet William, warmly. "But no one speaks so to you now, dear nurse?" he asked, with tender solicitude.

"No, no, my sweetling; every one has forgotten what a dark little witch old Mathilde was once, and every one thinks kindly of her gray locks now; but most of all, I trust, a little boy who is dearer to her than all the golden-haired little fairies in Normandy."

Sweet William kissed her, and Mathilde went on: "But we are talking of little fairies, and our thoughts have wandered from the chase. In my young days, William, the ways of children were different from what they are now. Nowadays nothing is too daring; and methinks I shall hear of my lady's capturing a wild boar all by her little self, some of these fine days."

"My cousin is a brave little maid, is she not?"

"My lady knows not the word 'fear,'" replied Mathilde, with much earnestness, as she thought of the intrepid way in which that little person had grown in intimacy with her redoubtable father, — a

creature more to be dreaded, in Mathilde's eyes, than all the wild beasts she knew of.

"And one has need to be brave to seek such peril for pleasure," she went on; "it makes one tremble to think of the mad rushing and scampering and the wild shouting that goes on to track a single deer. I can almost see them following after it, over the copse and fallen trees, across streams and over hillocks, until the poor thing falls from weariness or from one of their arrows. Oh, it is a wild game, and a great game in these days, my sweet; and you and I would rather talk of it than be in it, would we not?"

"And my fair cousin loves this sport?" said William, half to himself. "I thought she looked happy. Oh, what a day this will be for her! I should love to see her in the midst of it with the beautiful Roncesvalles, for I know he is a good and swift horse at the chase."

"My lady and Roncesvalles are good hunters both of them, and there is nothing they love more than this."

"And has she a falcon, too, like the rest of the hunters?" inquired Sweet William, whose interest in his fair cousin could not be quelled even by Mathilde's stirring account of a chase.

"Yes; and a cross, ugly bird it is to every one but my lady," returned Mathilde. "But he knows her call well, and always comes back to her with some bright pheasant or a long-legged heron, when she sets him a-flying."

The little boy remained silent. He was thinking what a happy, happy child his cousin must be, and what a score of things she had to make her so, and what Mathilde had said of her goodness, and how so many people loved her, and above all, how beautiful she was.

"Tell me, dear nurse," he said at length, "when shall I see my sweet cousin again? If I could but look upon her every day, as I did this morning, I could think of her all the day and dream of her all the night, and I should be so happy;" and his lip quivered, and his dark eyes grew sadder. For with the sight of that fair picture of happiness and beauty, there rose suddenly a great yearning in his hungry little heart.

The good nurse saw this, and her soul grew sick at the thought of this first ripple in the quiet contentment of his little life. The fear that he should come to know his wretched lot, or long for something which she could not give him, made her miserable. Alas! she could make no promise. She could only

encourage him with tender, hopeful words, and fondle him in her arms, and try to make him feel that much love was his, though it came but from her own old heart.

She coaxed him to go and have a game with Guilbert, feeling grieved that she had not been able to draw his thoughts away from the events of the morning. But Sweet William had no wish to be amused, and would only sit in her lap and talk of all that was in his heart. And all that day they two sat quietly together, building many hopes, talking of many things, but principally of the little girl at the castle, — of all that she did and said; of her pretty, winning ways that made every one love her so; of her fondness for Roncesvalles, the noble creature to whom she had given such a brave name; of her nurse Lasette, who had brought her up just as Mathilde had Sweet William; of the great castle where she lived; and indeed of everything that now bore a new charm in his eyes because of its association with the little girl.

And at dusk Sweet William stood again at his Bower and watched for the coming home of the hunters, hoping to get another glimpse of his dear cousin; but night fell all too soon, and no train of riders crossed the lonely road again, nor were

the notes of the bugle sounding their return heard about the walls of the Great Tower any more.

That night Sweet William had no play with Guilbert; and when he took up his little harp to sing with Nurse Mathilde, his fingers wandered idly over the chords, and she was more than once left singing alone, while he asked some distracted question about my Lady Constance. And when at last he laid his young head down to rest, and his eyelids drooped with sleep, the wondering smile that swept over his fair features, and the broken words that fell from his unconscious lips told of the subject of his dreams.

And Mathilde, the good devoted nurse, what was she thinking of that night as she bent over the sleeping William, and why did she hold her heart, and weep and kiss him over and over again, and lay her old cheek against his young one, and entreat him pitifully to forgive her and to love her always, as though his young ears had not been deaf to all but the voices of dreamland? And what dread was in her heart, as she looked into the pure white face of her boy, and saw the same patient, gentle look steal back again, and the same sweet smile that made it infinitely more sad to her now, rest upon it like the bitterest reproach? She knelt beside him a long, long

while, holding his little hand, winding his dark curls lovingly about her fingers, kissing his closed eyes, and calling him her darling, her heart's dearest, and praying Heaven to spare him; until at length Guilbert, who from his post without had been watching her, came noiselessly to her side, and inquired what new fears she had for the little one.

"Oh, my kind friend," said Mathilde, recovering herself a little, "is my heart not always full of fears for him? Can I see him growing day by day in grace and loveliness, and not grow sick with wondering what is to become of my darling?"

"Nay, nay, you lose hope," returned the old keeper, almost reproachfully, "and we must never do that. The dear one has not been unhappy with so good a mother as you, Mathilde, and he may never know his ill-luck till he is out of it."

"Ah, Guilbert, I fear he will know it too soon, too soon. Saw you not the change in him to-day after seeing his cousin Constance? He would talk of nothing else, think of nothing else; and I have strange misgivings that this is the beginning of something — I know not what — for my poor lamb." And Mathilde fell to sobbing and weeping bitterly.

This was terrible to the good keeper, who besides

cherishing a secret fondness for Nurse Mathilde, dreaded tears, next to my lord's anger, more than anything else in the world. Finding he could administer but little comfort, he entreated her to go and consult with Lasette, as she always did when especially concerned about Sweet William; and he himself sat beside the little couch, as he had done many a time before, watching the sleeping boy as tenderly and lovingly as any woman.

A moment later Mathilde was speeding down the great staircase of the tower, through narrow passageways and gloomy corridors, and out into the wide courtyard where the moonlight fell so peacefully upon the slumbering world. Away, away she sped, toward the old gray castle, where another child lay sleeping in that stately bedchamber where the twin babes had slept years ago. There the two nurses held a long and animated converse, speaking in hushed voices, confiding to each other the many hopes and fears which none but themselves could know. Lasette had much to tell Mathilde concerning my lady's discovery of the little boy in the Great Tower, of her eager questions about him, and of her own apprehensions lest that little lady's impetuous interest might lead to the good saints only knew what harm for them all.

It was far into the night when the nurse reached the tower-chamber again, and found Guilbert gently nodding over his young charge, and Sweet William still sleeping and dreaming of bright little fairies with flying golden hair and rosy smiles, that beckoned to him from afar.

"Dreaming of bright little fairies with flying golden hair and rosy smiles, that beckoned to him from afar."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Sweet William awoke late the next morning, the warm summer air was blowing softly at his windows, and the little birds were chirping noisily from their vines, as if chiding him for idly sleeping away the fresh morning hours. Nurse Mathilde was busy over a little table in Sweet William's bower, carefully setting forth his simple morning meal, and dressing it with dainty nosegays here and there to delight his eyes. Old Guilbert was mounting guard with a somewhat impatient step in the dark entry without, occasionally stopping to put his head between the bars of the great dungeon-door, and to smile a droll sort of smile at Mathilde, and nod mysteriously at his little prisoner.

Sweet William wondered why he felt so strange, and what it was that made yesterday seem so very long ago. Dear little boy! he did not know that something had just come into his life that would

make all his yesterdays seem like a distant and almost forgotten past.

As he sat at his small breakfast, quietly discoursing with his nurse on the strange and unreal happenings of the previous day, the old keeper's hearty laugh was heard outside; and presently the heavy door creaked on its rusty hinges, and Guilbert announced in joyful and excited tones, —

"The Morning Sunshine, come to see Sweet William."

In walked my little lady, dancing like a sunbeam, looking about her with round and curious eyes, and crying eagerly as she caught sight of William, —

"Oh, my sweet cousin, do you not know me? I am your cousin Constance. I saw you at this window yesterday for the first time, and I would not sleep till Nurse had told me all about you. She said your name is Sweet William, — I think it is a lovely name, — and that we are twin cousins. Are you not glad?" she asked, embracing him in her prettiest and friendliest way.

Sweet William did not say he was glad, but he looked radiantly happy, and for some time could only sit and gaze at her in speechless wonderment.

"I am very glad," Constance went on, "for I never had a cousin before; and I have scolded Lasette

shamefully for not telling me about you sooner. I have never had a little comrade, like you, Cousin William, — no one but Roncesvalles. He is dear and good, and I love him. But he can never be my cousin nor yet my twin cousin; for though he is so big and strong, I am a year older than he. And so Lasette said if I would be very good, and would not ask her a score of questions, but do as I was bidden, I might come to see you to-day; and I promised, for I wanted to know my cousin very much."

"And I too," said Sweet William, earnestly. "Lasette must be a good nurse, just like Mathilde."

"Yes; and I love her too. Oh, I love a great many people, Cousin, — old Jacques, and Francis, and Nurse, and Roncesvalles, and the old, old peasant who lives at the foot of the mount, and has lost all his little grandchildren, and who says I look like my sweet young mother. But most of all I love my dear father. You have never seen my father, have you, Sweet William? Oh, no, Nurse said you had not. He is a mighty lord, and I am sure you would love him as I do; for he is your dear uncle, as you are my dear cousin."

"And why did he not come with you?" inquired Sweet William.

"Oh, he is far away now, in the great wars, fight-

ing for his king. Had I only been a lad, like you, Cousin, I might have gone with him sometimes," added Constance, with a little sigh.

"And will he return soon, and shall I know him then?" asked Sweet William, eagerly.

"No; not for a long while yet. Nurse says we must never speak of you to him. I do not know why, and that is one of the questions I may not ask. But some day we shall surprise my lord, as I was surprised, and show him the little boy in the tower, and then we shall all be so happy. But this is all a secret. Have you ever had a secret, Cousin William?"

"Truly, I think never," answered Sweet William, with a puzzled look.

"Nor I, until now," rejoined my lady. "Nurse said to me, 'Constance, can you keep a secret?' and I said, 'Yes, Nurse, if it is not made of sweet stuff, — I love comfits too well to keep them long, you know.' Here are some I saved for Roncesvalles; he is very fond of sweets, but I will give them to you instead. Then she told me all this, — that my little cousin had lived in the Great Tower since he was a babe, and that no one ever saw him save his nurse and Guilbert the keeper; not even my lord. And she said he was a sweet and lovely child, never fretting naughtily like a little maid she once knew whose name was Con-

stance. Then she wept a little when I was not looking, and said, talking to her needlework more than to me, that 'Oh, it was a thousand pities!' Then I was very angry, — I am a wicked child sometimes, Sweet William, — and I scolded dreadfully, saying I would straightway take you from the tower, as I did the poor captives. But Nurse wept all the more, — she always does when I am wicked, — and said I would make you very unhappy if I did, and bring great trouble upon her. I fancied you must be wretched in a dungeon and would wish to leave it. But this is not at all like the gloomy prison where I saw the two noblemen. It was a dreadfully cold, dark place, and very strange to them, I should think, for they had never been in a prison before."

"But this is not a prison, surely, dear cousin?" said the little boy, questioningly. "I think it is a pleasant place, and have never wished to leave it."

"And are you quite happy here, Sweet William?"

"Yes, quite; but I shall be more so if you will come to see me often. We have great games, Guilbert and I together; and Nurse teaches me so many good and wise things, and at twilight we sing together, and in the evening Guilbert tells the longest story of the times when he was young. Oh, you should hear some of them, Cousin!"

"I will surely come every day. Indeed, Sweet William, I like your nurse Mathilde greatly. Her cap is a little queer and different from Lasette's," she whispered confidentially, "but she has the same good face. And Guilbert must be a truly good friend," she added, as she studied the old keeper attentively; for she had never seen any one just like him, she thought. His eyes were so very sharp and bright, though his hair was as white as snow; and there was a smile of good-nature in every wrinkle of his face. Then he looked so short and fat, with his wide ruff around his short neck, and his wide trousers caught in at the knees, and his quaint shoes with their great buckles and long pointed toes, that her little ladyship thought him the drollest creature she had ever seen.

"I am sure I should like him too. He was so good to let me in the tower this morning. Lasette came to the door with me, and whispered something in his ear; and then he laughed, and tossed me in his arms and cried, 'Ho, ho, little fairy!' You are fond of him, are you not, Cousin?"

"Mathilde and Guilbert are the only persons I have ever known, and the only ones I love excepting you, dear Constance," added the artless William.

Constance was so delighted with this ingenuous declaration that she immediately embraced Sweet

William again. And as if bent on making friends all around, she straightway ran and did likewise with Mathilde and Guilbert, who sat a little apart, watching their innocent pleasure.

Then the two children sat long together at the little table, — Sweet William joyfully laying before his little cousin the best portions of his simple meal, and giving her the choicest flowers, which Mathilde had gathered fresh that morning; while Constance in turn delighted him with her merry prattle.

"No, no!" remonstrated my lady, as William placed his largest nosegay before her; "I will have no other than those sweet purple posies over there. They are *your* flowers, and I shall always wear them in my hair, as ladies do the chosen flowers of their knights." And she took a handful of purple and white sweet-williams that stood in an earthen vase upon the window-ledge.

"Nurse brings these to me every day, and I like them best of all myself. She says they are like me; do you think so, Cousin?"

Constance looked at the tender blossoms, and then at the pure, sweet face before her, with its smile of innocence and its dark lustrous eyes and earnest, trustful look; and she said quite gently, —

"I do not know, Sweet William; but I have never seen in all the fields of Normandy a flower so lovely as

you. And there are many of them in the early summer, I do assure you, — marigolds and daffodils and daisies and blue violets everywhere. Roncesvalles and I love to go and gather them. And I make wreaths of rosemary for his dear neck, and he likes it; for I tell him that rosemary means true, and that I shall always be true to him. Oh, I wish that I might bring my Roncesvalles to see you! If you did not live in such a high tower, and he were not so very big, I would; for he is a beautiful and a brave horse."

"I thought so, as I saw him yesterday," returned Sweet William; "but you can ride under my window again, as you did then, and teach him to look up at me."

"Oh, I will, I will, and tell him all about my new cousin! Lasette need not fear but he can keep a secret even better than I; and he will be so glad, for he understands all I tell him, and nearly talks to me with his great eyes. But you may see Ixe; that is my hawk. A fierce black bird he is, with little silver bells at his talons, that tinkle and tell me where he is though he be ever so high. Oh, Sweet William, if you could but leave this tower and come with me to my father's castle, I would show you a thousand pleasant things, and we could have such sports together as you have never dreamed of."

Sweet William looked at her wistfully, and his deep eyes asked a question which his lips could not frame; and something in the tender face made Constance add hastily, —

"But I am again unmindful of Lasette's counsel. We must be patient and wait," she said; "and some day if we keep our secret well, you will surely come and live at the castle and be the Lord of Mount St. Michael and all Normandy. Think of it, Cousin!"

Sweet William could scarcely think of it. His eyes grew wide with surprise, as he asked, —

"How long must we wait, dear Constance?"

"I do not know, nor does Lasette; but surely not very many years, Sweet William, for you are almost tall enough now to be a king." And she looked admiringly at the slender, graceful young figure before her.

And so they went on, talking all the morning, and growing better friends every minute; telling each other the simple experiences of their little lives, which for being so different found greatest favor in their eyes. They made a grand survey of the tower-chamber; and Constance was shown Sweet William's cradle, and the little shoes in which he had learned to walk, and the curious toys that Guilbert had fashioned for his amusement, — in fact, all the quaint little relics of his babyhood, which Mathilde prized above

all her other earthly possessions, and which told of the simple comforts and great love that had been his. Sweet William took her to see his little birds, and told her the names of every one of them, as they hopped shyly in and out of their nests among the green vines; and he showed her how tame and friendly they were, and how they even ate little crumbs from his hand. And altogether Constance began to think the Great Tower the most delightful place she had ever seen, and declared she would spend all her days there till Sweet William was ready to leave it; and that then every dungeon at Mount St. Michael should be made just like it, that all little boys who were brought up in them might fare as peacefully and contentedly as did Sweet William. She tripped about the old gray chamber as familiarly as if she had lived in it always, yet finding something new and pleasant at every turn, admiring all she saw, and chattering like a linnet, while the young William followed her and listened with his sweet, serious smile.

At length Lasette came to take my lady away, and finding her in such good and amiable spirits, was well pleased with her daring venture, and promised to let her come again every day. As Lasette led the little girl away, she stopped to whisper in Mathilde's ear, —

"Have no fear, good sister! It was best to let my

lady have her way in this. Her dread of bringing trouble on the dear little one will make her mindful of my words. She is full of reason, and, trust me, no harm will come of it."

Mathilde made no reply, but she looked up hopefully; for Guilbert had told her of Lasette's plan while the two children were engaged in their artless talk, and many of her old fears had vanished and new hopes risen in their stead.

Yet she watched her little boy anxiously more than once that day, for he was thoughtful and silent beyond his wont; and though no shadow rested on his peaceful face, the absent look in his dark eyes showed that his thoughts were far away.

"And of what does my sweetheart think?" she asked, as she watched the long curling lashes droop pensively over his fair cheek.

"I was thinking," said Sweet William, "of what my fair cousin said of the poor captives in that other prison; and I was wondering why it was cold and dreadful there, and why they were unhappy. Is it a sad thing to be a captive, Nurse?"

"Ay, ay, sweet love; it is a dreary fate enough."

"And why are people shut up in gloomy towers like that, and made unhappy?"

"Ah, Sweet William," answered Nurse, "that is

what I cannot tell! I am too unwise to understand these things; but the good God knows best, and sometime he will set it all aright."

"And am I a captive, too, because I live in a dungeon?" asked William, with pathetic doubtfulness.

Mathilde clasped him in her arms. She could find no answer for these words.

"Why do you weep, good maman?" he said, caressing her tenderly. "Sure, this is no gloomy dungeon like the one my cousin spoke of, and I am very happy here."

"Oh, my little William, are you sure, very sure, that you are happy here?"

"So long as I have you with me, dear nurse."

"And is there nothing you long for and have not?"

"Nothing, now that I have seen my fair cousin. Truly, I should like to see the splendid castle she speaks of; but heard you not, dear Mathilde, what she said, — that we must wait patiently and some day I should be ruler of Mount St. Michael and Normandy?"

"That is my hope," returned Mathilde, half to herself; but she sighed as she thought of all that might happen before that great hope was fulfilled.

As for Sweet William, he had no knowledge of the strife and the bitterness born of such ambitious hopes; he knew only of peace and quietude and love and

gentleness, and his dreams of a blissful future were unclouded by any doubt.

"When I am a man, Mathilde, I will do good things," he said. "I should like to be a mighty lord, and make my people happy, and teach them to love me and to be good and wise. I would go through every castle in Normandy, and wherever I found an unhappy captive I would set him free. It is well to be powerful, is it not?"

"It is well to be powerful," answered Nurse, "if that power is directed to mercy. But, dearest heart, it is better to be born good and lovable than to be born a king. And I would rather my little one possessed a kindly heart than all the wealth and power of this great realm; for love is stronger and makes mightier conquests than all the deadly weapons of men."

And Sweet William pondered over these wise words in his heart, and remembered them long after many strange things for him had come to pass.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRUE to her promise, my Lady Constance appeared beneath Sweet William's Bower on the following morning. She rode the stately Roncesvalles, and waved her little hand toward the window where Sweet William stood smiling down upon them both. She halted, and bending forward until her rosy lips almost touched the listening ears of Roncesvalles, said in a coaxing little voice, —

"Come, good horse, look up at your cousin William. See! is he not a dear, dear cousin? No, no! this way, Roncesvalles; look where I look, and smile at him, do!"

But whether the face at the window was too high up for the proud Roncesvalles to look to, or whether he secretly felt that Cousin William bade fair to be a rival in his young mistress's affection, never a sign

of recognition made he, save to beat the earth impatiently with his hoofs.

"Look up just once for me," pleaded Constance, "and then you will want to look twice for yourself."

But Roncesvalles remained obstinate.

Sweet William dropped a handful of his own little blossoms from his window, and they fell partly on my lady's broad-brimmed hat and partly on the good horse's mane. Constance gathered them carefully, and put them to Roncesvalles's nose with childish audacity, using all her prettiest witcheries to win him; but he only shook his head uneasily, and breathed such a whiff out of his great nostrils that all the little petals were scattered to the winds.

"Oh, you are very, very naughty, and I do not love you," said she, with a contradictory smile. "Dear cousin," she added, looking up at the little boy apologetically, "you must excuse his bad behavior to-day. Roncesvalles is very rude sometimes, even with his own relations. I must set about teaching him better courtesy; but he has so many loving qualities, for all his ill-temper, that I cannot be very severe with him. Come!" cried she, drawing in her reins, "one more gallop to show my cousin what a brave, swift horse you are."

Roncesvalles awaited no second summons, but

started off at full speed; and a moment later he and my lady had disappeared in the descent of the winding road.

After that they rarely missed their morning turn around the foot of the Great Tower; and although Roncesvalles never grew very intimate with his cousin William, nor yet learned to smile at him as he was bidden, he appeared to become reconciled to my lady's fondness for her little twin-cousin, and in time actually seemed to take pride in doing his best before Sweet William, — galloping and cantering in his most graceful manner, and in fact displaying all the arts of an obedient and accomplished horse. And Sweet William from his high tower watched and admired it all, and "wondered" much in his quiet way at all the strange new things he saw.

It is astonishing how short a time it takes for young loves to grow. They are like the fair flowers of spring, which to-day are but tender buds, and to-morrow rich blossoms full of sweetness and promise. Sweet William and his little cousin, seeing more of each other as time went on, grew nearer and dearer each day. Nothing of interest ever took place at the castle but my lady brought glowing accounts of it to the little boy in his retirement. Before many weeks he had heard the histories of all the peasants of the

village. He knew by name all the good castle-folk at Mount St. Michael, and could have found, if he had had leave, the spots where the brightest flowers grew, or the trees where the rarest birds built their nests, or the places on the shore where the loveliest sea-shells lay, — so vividly had Constance pictured to him all the things and places that she loved most. Indeed, he had in that short time learned more of his own surroundings from her than he had in all the years of his young life from the wise Mathilde. And it was well for my lady that she was the one chosen by fate to enjoy the free and beautiful world without. Such an eager, restless little bird as she could never have listened to all the delights of a world from which she was shut out with that sweet, submissive spirit which rendered the gentle William so lovable. Not that he was entirely free from a secret wish to share them sometimes; but that his unquestioning faith in those he loved told him it was best to be as he was, and kept him from vain longings.

Yes, they were very happy in the Great Tower, these two little cousins; and Nurse Mathilde declared it was the sweetest pleasure she had ever known to watch them as they sat all the long autumn afternoons with their young heads together, talking and laughing as only children can, — Constance always animated, wild, impul-

sive; while Sweet William remained calm and serene, with only the wondering expression in his grave sweet eyes as he listened to the many stories that Constance had stored in her young memory.

There was one tale he always liked to hear better than all the rest; and that was the one about the old peasant who lived at the foot of the Mount, who had said that my lady resembled her pretty young mother. Constance related how the old man had lived these many years all alone in his little hut watching and waiting for a ship that never came; how his children and his grandchildren had all died, save one, who, being a brave and trusty seaman, had gone to man a ship which years ago had taken an unhappy lady from Mount St. Michael; and how the good sailor had promised the Norman people, who loved the lady dearly, that he would never show his face in Normandy again if he failed to pilot her safely back to her own country; and the weeks and the months and the years had rolled by, and no ship had ever returned, and no sailor ever brought news of a safe voyage. But love and hope are stronger than the wildest tempest, and the old Norman was still waiting and watching at the foot of the Mount for this last of all his loved ones. She told how the light was left burning every night against the good sailor's return, and

how the old man would often mistake the moaning of the wind or the murmur of the waves for the voice of the absent one, and with faltering steps and anxiously beating heart would go to the door of his little hut, only to let in the cold and darkness of night.

Sweet William always sighed after listening to this story of patient love, and said, —

"I wonder what became of the lady, Constance, and whether the ship will ever come back."

But Constance could not tell, and William's tender heart ached for the old man when he learned that his years of waiting had been as many as those of his own young life; and that to him seemed very long.

Then there was old Mother Anne, for whom Sweet William had conceived a lively interest. A remarkable person she seemed to him, from all the accounts he had of her. Constance had said that she possessed two pairs of eyes, one of which she used to look into the future. And it was certain that she made good use of them both, for she not only knew everything that went on in the village, but could tell all that would happen in years to come, they said. This rare gift William often coveted. How gladly would he have used those far-seeing eyes to look into his own mysterious future, and what a deal of wondering they

would have saved him about himself! He often tried to imagine what prophecies Mother Anne would have in store for him, and secretly wished he might beguile her into revealing some of her wisdom. But Mother Anne, like most people who have a talent, was choice of it, and never displayed it except on rare occasions. Even my lady thought her a little disobliging for never entering into the free and confidential talks with her which she liked so much from her elders. And when she once asked the old woman to teach her some of her wily arts, Mother Anne had only replied with a low chuckle, —

"He who knows nothing, fears nothing."

But as Constance feared nothing and knew a great deal for a little girl, she was somewhat disgusted with Mother Anne's logic.

Still, the old woman was very fond of the pretty child, her saucy prattle notwithstanding; and her son, a burly young peasant, had spent much time and care in training the famous Ixe as a gift from that worthy dame to my little lady on her feast-day. It was rather a dubious thing in those days to receive a gift from such a questionable personage as Mother Anne; especially as good or ill fortune was supposed to attend the gift, according to the manner in which it was given. But on this occasion Mother Anne had not committed

herself; she had only said in her most mystifying tones, —

"A light heart and a happy lot are yours, my pretty lady; but look you! should Ixe die before the year, you are in danger of losing both. Take care of him, good care of him, my little elf!" which harrowing prophecy caused Lasette to spend many an anxious and sleepless night. As for Constance, she always took the greatest care of her bird, — not on account of Mother Anne's words, which were mere riddles to her, but because she was fond of him, as she was of every living thing that came within the reach of her loving nature.

At last the brown autumn died away, and the cold winter came; and the gray mists rose above Mount St. Michael, and the white snow fell quietly, burying everything beneath it, and making the lonely landscape around Sweet William's Bower even more bleak and desolate. But none of the dreariness without ever found its way into the gray chamber now. There was always laughter and merry-making going on within; and although it had once been the gloomiest dungeon on Mount St. Michael, it was now lighted up with the sunshine of love and youthful graces, and often made bright and beautiful.

The days were all too short, and even the long

evenings came to an end much too soon for the happy little cousins; for it was then that Guilbert, sitting very straight in his high-backed chair, related his wonderful stories, and delighted the ears of Sweet William and Constance with his marvellous adventures. The good old fellow had kept a boyish heart, his white hairs notwithstanding; and his thrilling recitals were scarcely less a delight to himself than to the children. For he had a remarkable memory, had Guilbert, for things that never happened, or which happened so long before his time that he was hardly expected to have any recollection of them. It must be confessed that in his excitement he often grew sadly confused, and jumbled up his dates in a way that would have made any historian's hair turn white.

The artless William always listened intently, with his sweet, trustful, unquestioning smile, and his dark eyes filled with a look of innocent wonderment; but Constance, whose knowledge of events was vast in comparison, was often moved to shameful doubt, especially when Guilbert dwelt at length on his intimacy with William the Conqueror, or told what active part he took in the ravagings of the early Northmen, or even went so far as to hint at his having been one of the brave Roland's band, — forgetting, apparently,

"It was then that Guilbert told his wonderful stories."

that though the fame of these great heroes lives forever, their poor bodies had been lying in their rocky graves for centuries.

"Guilbert must be very, very old," Constance would conjecture. "Do you think, Sweet William, he could have seen the awful dragon that used to roam about Mount St. Michael before our great fortress was built?"

But Sweet William had never heard of the great dragon that roamed about Mount St. Michael; and Constance was fain to relate to him the old legend, which Nurse Lasette had repeated so many times that the little girl had it all by heart.

"It is strange to think of it, Sweet William," said she; "but once upon a time there was nothing on this high mount but gray rocks and great lonely trees growing in among them, — no abbey nor castle, and no one living near it for miles around. The people were afraid of it because this fearful dragon was hidden away under the topmost rock; and at dusk he came out and wandered about the mount, and ate up anybody he chanced to meet. He was the terror of all the country, but especially of the poor mariners, who were sure whenever they heard his terrible laugh that some great danger was ahead. Think, Cousin, how curious to hear a dragon laugh! A dragon is a dread-

ful creature with wings and a monstrous tail and a very unpleasant face. One would never think that he could laugh. The people were very sorry about this dragon; but most of all a good old bishop who lived near by, and who had prayed much to the blessed saints that the monster might be destroyed. One night the bishop had a strange dream; the Archangel Michael came to him and said, 'Go to the highest rock of the mount and slay the dragon, and there build a church in my name.' When the good bishop awoke he was glad indeed to find it was only a dream; for though he was anxious to be rid of the dragon, he would rather some one else did the slaying while he did the praying. But the second and the third night he had again the same dream; till at last Saint Michael struck him on the head with his thumb, and left a little round mark in his skull where no hair ever grew again. After that the good bishop did as he was told; and think of his terror, William, when he reached the top of the mount! The huge beast flapped its wings, and opened its great jaws as if it would swallow him whole; but he was brave now, for the good angel was near him, and as he raised his sword the dragon laughed one of its horrid laughs and fell down dead. Then the bishop laid the first stone on the place where the dragon fell, and after that a little church

was built, and the mount called Mount St. Michael in honor of the archangel. And ever since Saint Michael has been the patron saint of France and Normandy."

"If it were not for the mark of the saint's thumb," observed Sweet William, pensively, "I would almost think Guilbert were that bishop; it is like some of the brave deeds he did in his youth. Guilbert has been so many things, Constance, is it not possible he might have been a bishop?"

But Constance, upon second consideration, thought not; for though Guilbert possessed an ample circular baldness on the top of his venerable head which would have been testimony enough for him, all this had happened so many hundred years ago — no one knew exactly how many — that she felt certain Guilbert could claim no share in it.

"And then," she went on, "the castle was built, and the little church was made into the large and beautiful abbey that it is now, by the powerful dukes of Normandy. There is a picture of the good archangel there, and you should see it, dear William, — such a heavenly face when the sunshine falls on it through the purple and crimson windows! I can almost think he is looking straight at me and saying, 'I am the patron of little children; I love and protect them all.'

Have you never seen the face of the good Saint Michael, William?"

"Surely no, dear Constance; I do not understand. How may one see the faces of those who are not on earth?"

"Oh, Sweet William dear!" said my lady, laughingly, "you can see the portrait of any one, — even of persons who are not living now, or who never were on earth at all."

"And what is a portrait like?" inquired Sweet William, innocently.

"Just like a living person whose face is ever smiling, and whose eyes are always looking straight at you. Some of them are very beautiful. Great men whom the world calls artists paint them; and you would not believe it, Cousin, but with a few bright colors and a long brush they fashion faces that look like some one you love. My dear father is fond of lovely portraits, and he has many of them at the castle, of all the lords and ladies that have lived at Mount St. Michael. And there is one of my father too, — a great glorious figure in shining armor, and the mighty look in his eye that I love so well. When he is far away and I long for him, I sit and watch the painted face, and it is almost like seeing him."

"What a wonderful thing a portrait is!" said Sweet

William, in astonishment. "Tell me, dear Constance, would I know and love my lord as you do, if I saw his face in the portrait?"

"I am sure you would, Sweet William. My father has a brave face; it is stern and terrible sometimes, but it is always kind when it looks at me. And I know that he would love you, Cousin dear, just as he does me, if he only knew all about you."

Sweet William had no doubt of this. Indeed, he knew of no reason why my lord should do otherwise than love him. Had he met with aught but the deepest and tenderest devotion from the few faithful hearts that, so far, had come within the scope of his little life? Yet a gentle sigh rose to his parted lips, and suddenly the look of yearning came into his great soft eyes.

"Dearest Constance," said he, "I wish something very much."

"And what is that, Sweet William?" inquired Constance, eagerly.

"That I might, just for one little moment, go with you to the castle and look upon the face of my lord."

CHAPTER IX.

IT was so seldom that Sweet William wished for anything very much, or at least so seldom that he spoke of his wishes, that Nurse Mathilde and old Guilbert were quite startled by this sudden avowal. And to little Constance, who had but to speak in order to obtain what she wanted, it seemed a great wrong that Sweet William should be suffered to long for anything in vain.

Constance had been wise and docile beyond the expectation even of the good nurses. She had helped to make Sweet William's life in the Great Tower happier and brighter than it had ever been. But it could hardly be hoped that even the gentle William could listen day after day to the wonders of the great free world, and hear of the kindred of whose rightful love he had mysteriously been

robbed, without feeling, now and then, a secret longing to see and share them all.

Constance no sooner heard the words, than her own heart unconsciously felt their tender pathos. Her ingenious little brain responded at once, and in a twinkling she had surmounted all difficulties.

"Sweet William dear," she said, "why should you not come to the Great Hall with your nurse and me and see the portrait? We should be gone but a little while; and if you returned to the tower in safety, what harm would be done? Guilbert is such a good kind keeper, he must surely let you go just for one little moment."

But Guilbert, who happened to overhear this dangerous praise of himself, began to gesticulate so wildly, cutting off his head with an imaginary sword, falling on his knees and imploring mercy from some invisible tyrant, and otherwise manifesting such signs of inward perturbation, that one might easily have doubted whether he were the kind keeper that Constance thought him, or the most ferocious of custodians.

Sweet William's eyes lighted up strangely at the sound of his cousin's words. The thought of leaving the tower-chamber even for a single moment had never presented itself to him, or indeed to any one else,

in the light of a possibility. He started and ran to his nurse, his dark curls blown from his fair forehead, and his face faintly flushed with excitement.

"Oh, good Mathilde, could we — could we, do you think?" he cried, throwing himself on the little stool at her feet, and resting his clasped hands on her knees.

What did make poor Nurse Mathilde falter and tremble so? What is it that makes us all weak and yielding at the sight of a pleading child? She forgot her own peril and his. She forgot everything when her darling sat there looking up at her with his great yearning eyes; and taking his dear face between her hands, she said, —

"Yes, sweetheart, if the good Guilbert will let us."

But here the good Guilbert gave an alarming gasp which might have been taken for his last breath, and went through such another evolution of strange grimaces that Constance was fain to laugh outright at him, and call him a simple old soul. No one understood as he did, however, the great risk he would run in allowing even for one short hour a prisoner of my lord's to go from beyond his watch. A dungeon-keeper's duty was very serious in those days, and Guilbert plumed himself on having been a just and faithful servant all his life.

But this was such a peculiar case, Mathilde argued, and the children's design was such an innocent and harmless one, and my lord was so many miles away, that surely he need have no fears. And then Constance pleaded with him so prettily, and Sweet William looked at him so longingly, that very soon poor Guilbert began to yield. "If I did not love my prisoner so dearly and hate my master so heartily," he thought, "I would not, for the first time in my five-and-sixty years, fail in my trust. But there is no wrong in doing good, no wrong in granting a simple happiness to a child like Sweet William," he reasoned with himself; and after having recounted a multitude of instances in which the direst and most terrible consequences had resulted from a tower-keeper's allowing little boy-captives to go about and view their lordly uncles' portraits, he gave his consent with fear and trembling.

Mathilde made all sorts of promises, to appease the good servant's concern. She even went so far as to say she would give herself up as his prisoner for life, if she failed to return with Sweet William before the great bell of the abbey rang out another hour. And, if you will believe me, this proved so satisfactory that Guilbert immediately loosened the heavy bolts, albeit with a merry twinkle in his eye; and he

was rash enough to hope secretly that Mathilde would not be quite true to her word.

It was Sweet William's turn to be surprised when, for the first time in his life, he stepped beyond the threshold of the Great Tower chamber; when he breathed the clear, frosty air of the Mount, and pressed with his little feet the pure, newly fallen snow; when he saw the tall green pines swaying their loose branches so near that he could almost touch them; and when at last he beheld the gray old walls of the castle rising in stately grandeur before him.

Oh, little children who love and enjoy the beautiful free world, with all its glorious wonders, who look up day after day to its great blue dome, and drink in freely the precious influence of its warmth and light and sunshine, think what it must have been to the little William when he saw and felt it all for the first time! No wonder his little heart beat violently, and he held Mathilde's hand so tightly, as they sped in silence through the great courtyard, and into wooded paths, and up the narrow corridors and winding stairways, till the home that was so familiar to Constance seemed to him like a delightful labyrinth.

But the Great Hall of the castle, in all its gloomy magnificence, surpassed everything that Sweet Wil-

liam had ever dreamed of. So many rare and costly things greeted his eyes; powerful-looking swords whose hilts were of burnished gold, hung crossed upon the walls; soft silken curtains fell partly over the beautifully latticed windows, and richly embroidered tapestries hung on every side; while the dark oaken furniture, so massive and curiously shaped, was a source of bewilderment to William, who could only look his admiration and remain speechless. At one end of the hall was my lord's ducal throne, made of richly carved wood and adorned with beaten brass; and overhead a canopy of gold and purple draperies from which hung the heavy crown that had rested on the great dukes of Normandy for centuries. Opposite, at the end of a long colonnade of arching marble pillars, was the banqueting-table where the great feasts went on, and where the noblemen drank out of jewelled goblets and ate from golden plates; and above it hung the famous portrait of the Duke, the great glorious figure that Sweet William had longed to see.

But there, too, over the tall chimney-piece hung another portrait of such exquisite beauty that the moment Sweet William's eyes fell upon it, they were blind to everything else. It was the portrait of a lady, young and beautiful, with a look of ineffable

sweetness beaming down from dark, tender eyes that seemed to follow William and look straight at him wherever he stood.

"And who is this?" he asked in a voice that was almost tremulous.

"She was my mother," said Constance, gently. "Was she not a lovely lady? She died, dear cousin, when you and I were babes. I often wonder why it was so, and think how dearly I should have loved her, had she been spared to her little child. She was as good as she was beautiful, and every one loved her at Mount St. Michael; and my father once said to me that the light of the world went out for him when her dear eyes closed."

Sweet William put his arm around the little girl's neck, and his own eyes filled with tears.

"But he has you, dear Constance, and you are sunshine enough for all the world," he said tenderly.

"I am only a little maid, Sweet William, and but a poor companion for so great and wise a lord as my father. I have seen him many and many a time sit before the portrait and watch it long and earnestly, and I knew that he was thinking of her, and longing to have her back with him. Oh, William, do you ever wish, as I do, that you might have known and loved your sweet young mother?"

"She was my mother."

Sweet William made no answer. But as he looked more intently at the beautiful face above him, he felt for the first time in his life that there was hidden away somewhere in his heart a great love for some one he had never known.

"If she was like this," he said at length, without taking his eyes from the picture, "I could love her without seeing her. But, Constance, is there not a portrait of my mother in the castle?"

"I think I have never seen one, Cousin dear," said she, with a puzzled look.

The two children were silent for a moment while they stood looking up at the lovely face. Constance was thinking what a splendid thing it was to be a good and beautiful lady and to be loved and remembered always, and was hoping that she too might be so some day; while Sweet William was wondering, in his grave and quiet way, why Constance had never spoken of her mother to him.

But my lady had so many people about her to love and to talk of, that it was not strange she had apparently forgotten one who lived only in her fancy. Then the thought came to Sweet William, as it had sometimes of late, that Constance had been blessed in everything; even in her loss she had been blessed more than he. But there was no bitterness nor regret

in the passing thought; it came and went like an April snow-flake, leaving no trace of sadness in his unselfish heart.

"Tell me more of this lady," he said at last, turning to Constance. "I love her face dearly, it is so very beautiful."

"I know but little, Sweet William; it grieves my father to speak of her, and Nurse cannot do so without weeping. But it never saddens me to think of her, for I know she is safe and happy with the angels, and that she looks down from heaven and sees us, just as she is doing from the portrait now."

Sweet William looked again at the painted face, and then at the little girl's, so fair, so full of life and light; and he thought there was a sweetness in it just then that showed her heart at least was like the beautiful lady's. But he wondered a little how his cousin came by her sunny locks and eyes of blue. Surely the old Norman at the foot of the hill was mistaken, or else sorrow and age had dimmed his memory; for my lady did not resemble her young mother. They were both beautiful, but as unlike as twilight and dawn.

The great bell on Mount St. Michael ringing out the close of this eventful hour in Sweet William's life, roused him from his meditation; and Constance ran

to Nurse Mathilde, — who had likewise fallen into a quiet reverie, — and laughingly reminded her that Guilbert had now two prisoners instead of one; and furthermore, that he might be indulging in some dangerous pastimes at the thought of losing them both.

And in truth she was not mistaken, for they found the good keeper in a serious state when they returned. He declared this had been the longest hour in all his life, and that never before, not even when the chief of the fierce Kymry had held the battle-axe three days over his head, had he known such anguish as when the last stroke of the bell had died away and he found himself still alone in the tower. Indeed, he had some notion of throwing himself from the tower-window, but that Sweet William and Mathilde arrived just in time to prevent this undignified close to his brave career.

There was such a droll mixture of mirth and seriousness in his words, and such a look of triumph in his keen gray eye in spite of his feigned discomfiture, that Sweet William could not refrain from laughing; and clasping him around the neck, he cried, —

"Oh, Guilbert, you mistrustful Guilbert, to think we should ever desert you! He does not deserve a kiss, does he, Nurse?" But Sweet William gave him a

great many, nevertheless, as though they had been parted a weary time.

"Nay, nay, my little one! I had little fear of that; but, to tell you truly, the minutes were very long without seeing your sweet face. Now come and tell me all that has happened to make my little blossom's eyes so bright."

So, climbing upon the old man's knee, William related all his adventures, and told of the wonderful things he had seen; and even hinted, albeit very cautiously, that he might like to repeat the experiment at some future time. At which proposition Guilbert showed the whites of his eyes in a way that was quite alarming; but all the while there was such a light of pleasure in the little boy's face that the good keeper felt well repaid for his few anxious and lonely moments.

But Sweet William, like all tender and sensitive natures, spoke least of the thing that was nearest his heart; and when the excitement of the day was over he grew quiet and pensive again, and no one but his ever watchful nurse caught glimpses of the sober thoughts that were busying his young brain. Until quite late that evening he sat in his favorite retreat, looking out upon the night. All was quiet and peaceful, and the cold bright stars looked down benignly

upon the white earth below. A misty moonbeam came slanting through the Bower-window, and fell full upon the graceful figure within. Mathilde heard a little sigh, and saw the thoughtful look steal again into his deep eyes.

"What is it, dearest heart?" she asked, bending softly over the young face, so pure and frail in the pale radiance that fell upon it.

"Nothing, good nurse. I was only wondering," said Sweet William, without looking up, — "wondering about the beautiful lady in the portrait."

And indeed he had occasion to wonder a great deal, and his childish soul was often turbulent as the tide of time rolled on to still more eventful days.

CHAPTER X.

ALL this time Duke William seemed to have forgotten his dangerous little enemy in the Great Tower; at least, so all the good people of Mount St. Michael thought. And the little lady Constance would have had good cause to be lonely, and to sit and watch the glorious figure in the portrait, had it not been for the companionship of the little cousin, whose beautiful and tender devotion so utterly filled all the longings of her childish heart. It seemed such a great while since my lord had been at the castle, and so many things had happened during these many months of cousinly intercourse, that Constance was beginning to feel, she said, as she used to feel "years ago," when she was a very little girl and did not even know what a dear, good father she had; except that then she had only imagined the most absurd and impossible things about him, whereas

now she could think of him as he was, and remember all sorts of pleasant things about him, and hope for his return.

In youth hopefulness and cheerfulness are hardy little plants, and the heart whence they spring is very fertile; and it is not to be wondered at that a sanguine and buoyant nature, like that of little Constance, could find no reason to mourn the absence even of one whom she loved and revered as she did my lord. It is true she would sometimes ask Lasette what there could be about wars that kept the noblemen of Normandy away from their castles for so long. But Lasette was forced to confess herself very ignorant on the subject of wars, and really could not say why great lords went to them so much, and still less why some of them never returned. Then Constance would add, in a way that never made the good nurse jealous, —

"I should feel sad very often, Lasette, thinking about my father so far away, but that I have my dear cousin. One must get very lonely without one's own kindred, don't you think? Even though one may love others very much, it is never quite the same, you know. And then I think one's twin-cousin must be nearer than any other kin in the world. Sometimes I feel as if I could never live away from my dear Sweet

William. When he is a man and a great lord, and must go off to the wars, I shall go with him."

If Duke William could have heard these simple words, he would have been startled into an unpleasant recollection of his youthful prisoner. It was well he did not. He would better have parted with the half of his dukedom than shared the love of Constance with his enemy's child. Still, he was not entirely free, during these long months, from the memory of a child, beautiful and innocent, growing up to boyhood in the gloomiest dungeon of the great Norman fortress. Although his heart was cruel and his conscience seared, there were many, many moments when the thought of that child filled him with unrest. How would it all end, and what was he to do that the end, when it did come, might serve all his selfish and revengeful motives, were questions that beset him almost daily.

When Sweet William was but a baby, my lord had sent him to the tower, hoping that the gloom and confinement, and the lack of all that makes life precious and worth living for, would shorten the tender life, and thus save him from deliberately adding one more wicked deed to his already long list of sins. But now every year, every month, every day added to Sweet William's life made him more dangerous and more to be dreaded in Duke William's eyes. Many a night

as my lord lay on his uneasy pillow, his brain busy with godless and designing schemes, would he resolve to take the child's life as ruthlessly as he had taken that of his own young brother; but when the light of the morning came, the evil he had meditated in darkness frightened him, and he was left weak and helpless. There was a lurking fear in his heart that it would go ill with him if he put the boy William to death, — William, the only male descendant of his noble line, and bearing his own name. It was as if a voice spoke to him and a strong hand withheld him whenever this wicked thought came into his brain. Perhaps, too, he could not but confess to himself how guiltless and helpless this same little William really was, and how useless it would be to bring sorrow and suffering on the innocent child.

Oh, it is but an unholy pleasure to seek revenge, even for the real wrongs done to us; but how infinitely worse is it to inflict needless pain on hearts young and loving that have never known the shadow of evil! Such a wrong rests like a curse on him who deals it.

Sweet William's heart was as pure and beautiful as his face, as those who knew him well said. But my lord did not know this: he only knew that however good and beautiful the child might be, he was a living

reproach to him, and troubled his conscience more than Duke William had ever allowed anything to trouble him before; and, strange as it may seem, these secret misgivings came most frequently to my lord during those last months when his little daughter Constance and her cousin William were learning to love each other so dearly, and dreaming such bright visions of future happiness, and making such artless resolutions to be together always. His own dreams might have been more uneasy, had he known how the sacred ties he had striven to kill were asserting themselves strongly and mysteriously in spite of him, and that in the very prison he had destined for their graves, Love and Youth and Purity were growing side by side.

Daily the sun rose on Mount St. Michael, and daily it sank behind the purple clouds across the sea, and yet Duke William came not, and the little twin-cousins spent their days happily in the Great Tower, and the good nurses began to think my lord had quite forgotten them all. But he had not; and I think it was only the will of a wise Providence that though his thoughts were so often at Mount St. Michael, Duke William himself should have been kept away, in order that this pure, strong love might gain a firmer growth.

It is surprising how suddenly the clouds come up in a clear sky, and still more surprising how such a small thing as a cloud can darken a whole world. It is very often so in our own lives; when we are happiest, something comes up all at once that seems to chase away all our sunshine. It was just at this time, when everything was so peaceful and quiet at Mount St. Michael, that an incident occurred which filled the good castle-folk with the direst forebodings; for I am sorry to say that the people in those days were very superstitious, — particularly the people who lived in small provinces, and who were ignorant, — and an omen of ill-luck often caused greater anxiety and distress than the real misfortune it was so surely supposed to announce.

Nurse Mathilde had said, just a few days before, that she could scarcely remember a happier time in all her life. There was her little William, sweeter and comelier than ever, and my lady growing so wise and gentle. And what with Nurse Lasette, who often joined them in their merry-makings now, there was hardly a happier family to be found in Normandy. And there was Guilbert, too, growing whiter and droller every day, especially in his attempts to transform the Great Tower chamber into the scene of some thrilling event in his life. Great battles were re-

hearsed, and wild hunts and exciting tournaments were played at by turns. Indeed, there was scarcely any one of these popular diversions in which Sweet William had not been taught by his fair cousin; and with the true spirit of a little nobleman of his time, his progress was very rapid. He won great honors at these homely festivities, with no other competitors than a host of imaginary champions, and a most partial and enthusiastic audience. He won his spurs with uncommon facility, and after many other glorious achievements was knighted with all due solemnity, my Lady Constance herself dubbing him with their little mock wooden sword.

In one thing, certainly, Sweet William was distinguishing himself. He was becoming a good archer. He must have inherited the gift or else been a wonderfully apt pupil; for with but a few instructions from Guilbert he soon learned to handle my lady's little cross-bow as gracefully as any Robin Hood, and to send his arrow flying as swiftly and skilfully as many a practised sportsman. Constance always admired and applauded his successes; for she, too, was a fair archer, and capable of appreciating his skill. There was nothing they enjoyed more than standing together at one of the tower-windows and throwing out little pebbles which Nurse Mathilde had pre-

viously sewed up into deceiving little round bundles, to see which one could send his arrow quickly enough to split the little bag and release the pebbles.

In these shooting-matches the hawk Ixe was always a lively spectator. He would sit perched upon one of the projecting bars of the window, and eye the little farce half disdainfully and half approvingly; and when a victory was won, and the merry laughter of the two children rang out upon the quiet landscape, he would fly down with a great show of enthusiasm, and return bearing the little woollen trophy in his beak.

It was thus that the little twin-cousins were engaged on one of the first long spring afternoons. Constance stood beside Sweet William, flinging out the little targets; but either my lady was in a playful mood and tried some of her little witcheries to baffle him, or else luck was not on his side, for he missed them every one.

"Oh, come, Sweet William, try just once more, do! You must not be discouraged yet," said her ladyship, with an engaging smile, as the little boy laid down his bow with a disappointed look. "See! I will throw this one very straight. Hold your bow long and steadily, so; and do not move until I give the word."

Sweet William retreated a step or two, threw back his curly head with a resolute air, and held his bow at arm's length for a long second or two.

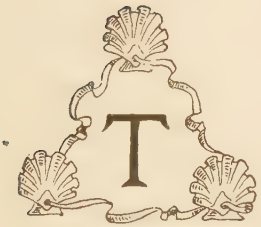
"Fly!" cried my lady.

At the word, which she had always used in hunting with her falcon, Ixe sprang from his perch as swiftly as the arrow itself, and crossed it just in time to receive its sharp point in his black breast.

Constance uttered a piercing cry, and covered her face with her hands. Mathilde fell back in her chair with a smothered groan; and the little cross-bow dropped from Sweet William's helpless hands, and his face was as deadly pale as if the arrow had been in his own heart.

My lady's feast-day was not for a fortnight to come, and the bird Ixe lay dead beneath the tower-window, with Sweet William's arrow buried deep in his black plumes.

CHAPTER XI.



HE death of the black hawk was regarded in the light of a great calamity at Mount St. Michael, — by Constance, who had been so fond of him and spent so many pleasant hours in his company; by Sweet William, who bewailed his wretched luck, and could not forgive himself for bringing sorrow to his dear cousin; but more especially by the good people at the castle, who remembered Mother Anne's words, and plainly saw that this event foreshadowed some great evil.

Mathilde and Lasette were in frequent consultation together, and wore such anxious faces that Sweet William wondered secretly if the loss of the poor bird could really make his nurse act so curiously at times. She had never shown any remarkable affection for the creature; indeed, she had spoken of him once or

twice as a wild, audacious thing, as like to pick my lady's pretty eyes out as do any other dangerous mischief. And then, too, Lasette had wept almost as much as my lady, and bidden her return no more to the tower that day, but spend the hours of play in giving her favorite due and honorable burial. Ixe, like most of fortune's pets, had had many envious enemies in his lifetime; but when he died every one seemed to mourn for him. It is a strange world, and Sweet William was greatly puzzled.

Nor was the general consternation at all lessened when, some days later, intelligence was brought that my lord the Duke was actually on his way to Mount St. Michael, with a great company of lords and ladies. This, to the anxious people, made every imaginary evil possible.

But, on the contrary, my lord came home in an unusually benevolent frame of mind. For the wars were ended for a brief season, and peace reigned throughout France. It was a happy time. Great victories had been won, and men had distinguished themselves and were on their way homeward rejoicing. Every one seemed disposed to make merry, — even the surly Duke of Normandy, who was returning on purpose to prepare for a great joust given by his king.

It was always so in those days, — men were either

fighting one another in good earnest or doing so in jest. The most popular amusement of the day was the tournament, where valiant knights wrestled with one another, and went through all the mimicry of real combat for the entertainment of royal beholders. And this was thought a fitting way to celebrate any joyous event, even the close of a fierce warfare and the reconciliation of two great nations.

Such a tournament it was that Duke William was making ready for, so gorgeous and festive and splendid in every way that it has not its like in all history. It was to be held in a beautiful valley of France near the famous city of Calais; and for months before great ships loaded with the costliest and rarest luxuries were sailing into this great port, and leaving their cargoes to array the chosen camp. Thousands of workmen were there, busy erecting temporary palaces and gay pavilions and richly furnished tents for the king and his nobles, who were now gathering from all the country round; and scarcely anything else was talked of for weeks beforehand.

But at Mount St. Michael, so far out on the lonely sea, where the only nobleman was a little boy shut up in a great tower, no news of all this had come, until Duke William himself brought the tidings. And the elaborate preparations that were then made threw the

good castle-folk into such a state of excitement that they quite forgot the little episode of the Great Tower.

Now Duke William did not mean to be outshone by any knight in France in the coming festivities. He accordingly gave orders that a splendid ship should be fitted out, — a ship magnificent enough to bear so mighty a lord as he to the grand tournament. The fair vessel was brought to the shores of the rocky Mount, and for days nothing was done at the castle save to prepare for the eventful journey; and nothing was left undone that could in any way add glitter and glory to its pageantry.

It had been a whim of my lord to take his little daughter with him on this festive tour, and he was pleased to think that her beauty and spirit would be greatly admired by all his noble friends. It was a very uncommon thing, an extraordinary thing, I might say, for a little girl like Constance to share the amusements of older people, much less to travel about for pleasure. True, she had been especially favored as a child, but she had never dreamed of such a privilege as this. Therefore, when her father made known his intention, and told her of all the gorgeousness that would be displayed there, and of the feasting and merry-making, and of all the royal personages

that were to be present, she could scarcely contain her rapture.

That night she went straight to the Great Tower, and confided her good fortune to Sweet William. In her own animated way she related all the wonders her father had described to her. She made such a long and impressive story of my lord's achievements, and the bravery he had displayed in the late conquests, that the ingenuous William was inclined to believe that the great feast was being held chiefly in honor of my lord.

"And think of it, Sweet William," cried my lady, clapping her little hands excitedly. "I shall see a real tournament, and the king himself, and the bravest knights and loveliest ladies of Europe, and, Cousin dear, the most beautiful horses in the land, — horses, my father says, that would make even Roncesvalles hang his head. But he says that only to try me, for he knows that my Roncesvalles is the dearest horse in all the world. Oh, I shall miss him, I fear," she added pensively "and you, too, my sweet cousin." And she laid her hand ever so gently on the little boy's cheek.

Sweet William looked up at her, and a little shade of trouble filled his eyes.

"And must you go away and leave me?" he asked.

"Yes; but not for long, William dear. And I shall have so much to tell you when I return; we shall talk about it for days. Will you not like to hear about all the wonderful things I am going to see?"

Something in the little boy's tender nature told him he must not mar his dear cousin's happiness with any regrets of his own; and though his heart was heavy at the thought of parting from her even for a few short weeks, he answered quite cheerfully, —

"Oh, I will indeed, Constance; but I shall like better than all to see you coming home again. When does the ship set sail?"

"Not for a fortnight," returned my lady, — "time enough for Nurse to teach me courtly manners and how to make a pretty reverence. She cautions me every day about my good behavior, and says I must not prattle much, as I do here; for in the big world children are wont to sit and listen while their elders speak. I have much to learn, Sweet William, and I am such a wilful child that poor Lasette will be quite grave, I fear, before she has made a good lady of me."

Sweet William was about to interpose, but she put the tips of her rosy fingers on his lips, saying, —

"No, no, William! you must not contradict me. I *am* a very naughty child. I am always making Nurse cry. But yesterday I said to her that my father would

take you to the tournament too, if she would let me tell him that you were here. But she looked at me with such sad eyes, and said 'Constance, Constance,' so reproachfully, that I had to promise again and again I would keep our secret from him. Oh, I wish that wanting to be good could make one so!" And Constance rested her little chin on her hands and was silent for a moment, as if quite overwhelmed at the thought of her iniquities.

"I ought to be good," she added after a pause, "for I have much to make me happy."

"You are very good, I think," added Sweet William, seriously; "and that is why you are so happy."

"Oh, my dear, dear cousin," cried my lady, in surprise as well as pleasure, "do you really think so?" And she ran up to him and embraced him heartily.

In all their little scenes Sweet William's fondness, unlike that of Constance, was always evinced in a quiet and gentle dignity, which contrasted singularly with the little girl's ardent and captivating demonstrations; and a stranger looking in upon them would hardly have taken them for children of the same hour.

"Now, Constance, tell me more about the beautiful ship," Sweet William said, as they walked hand in hand to the window overlooking the sea.

So she made a vivid picture of the splendors she anticipated; for she was an imaginative little person, and William never wearied of listening to the lively prattle that Nurse Lasette had seemed to condemn.

"Our ship will sail past this very window," said she, "and you must stand here and smile at me; and I shall look up and remember you so all the while I am gone. Will you, Sweet William?"

Sweet William promised, and for the moment forgot his own disappointment in her happiness.

A little later when my lady turned to say good-night, she kissed Sweet William tenderly, and whispered in his ear, —

"I am very happy, Cousin dear, but I should be much happier if you were going with me."

At last the eventful day arrived; and my lady, looking her fairest in her pretty gown of white, and the June sunshine lighting up her bright hair, stepped on board the splendid vessel, followed by Nurse Lasette, and then Duke William and all his retinue, and a host of lords and ladies in gay and gorgeous costumes, — the most brilliant company the rocks of Mount St. Michael had looked down upon for many a long day. There was music and dancing and feasting aboard, and merry laughter rang out on the sea,

and high above all floated the white banner of Normandy, with the lilies of France upon it, emblazoned in purple and gold. Then the anchors were loosed,

and the sailors' glad shout rose from the waters, and the fair ship set sail upon a quiet sea.

All this Sweet William saw from the window of the Great Tower, and the promised smile on his young lips was very faint, as he saw the last flutter of my lady's golden hair. He looked long and wistfully after

the gallant ship, — long after the last of her happy crew had faded out of sight, and her tall white sails looked like the wings of some great sea-bird; and then he turned away with a heavy heart, and fell into the arms of his nurse Mathilde and sobbed away all his bitterness.

Oh, the memory of a first sorrow, a sorrow like this, — to part from that we love best in all the world! How it lingers in the heart, how it hovers about us even in happier moments! Sweet William never forgot this hour. He had enjoyed the love and companionship of so few people during his strange childhood that to lose sight of one of them even for a brief season seemed like taking a part of his own life away; and a sense of dreary emptiness oppressed him, and filled him with vague fears.

Mathilde tried to comfort him, as she alone could do, with cheerful words and promises; and she cradled him in her arms as tenderly as in the days of his babyhood. But Sweet William could not help remembering that another ship had once gone from the shores of Mount St. Michael and never returned; and he wondered if he should have to watch and wait as the old Norman peasant had done.

The days were very long now, without my lady's bright little person in the tower-chamber; and Sweet

William had so much leisure to think and ponder over his mysterious seclusion, and he was so much wiser than in the old days when his relations with Constance were only fanciful, that Nurse Mathilde plainly saw the end. Sweet William would awaken to his wretched lot. In spite of all her efforts, the tower would be to him what it had been to so many others, — a dreary prison whose walls stood between him and all life's blessings. It would be unbearable, and his young soul would droop and sicken under it all; and this thought was so distressing to her that she could hardly keep a brave face for her darling. But she prayed, oh so earnestly, in her heart that the good God would provide some way, any way, by which her precious boy might be spared from the evils that seemed threatening.

Long before the time appointed for my lord's return to Mount St. Michael, Sweet William was keeping a patient and faithful vigil at the tower-window. He was never tired of looking out across the tranquil sea, though for many more days nothing was seen upon its bosom but the blue reflection of the summer heavens.

CHAPTER XII.

WITH a gentle and prosperous wind, the fair Norman vessel soon entered into port at Calais. Already the great city was alive with the spirit of the prodigious feast. Everything was stirring, and had a wonderfully festive look. Even the working-people, dressed out in their Sunday costumes seemed for the time to have little else to do besides watching the gay multitudes flocking toward the place of meeting. The road thither was hung with garlands, and strewn with flowers, and lighted by hundreds of flaming torches. Gorgeous equipages rolled by incessantly, while strains of martial music echoed far and wide; and it really seemed as if the whole world were on a glorious holiday.

My little Lady Constance, who had been in ecstasies all the way, was now quite bewildered by this new magnificence. Her bright blue eyes were bigger

and brighter than ever, and her active little tongue could hardly ask questions fast enough. She entirely forgot Nurse Lasette's injunction, and her unrestrained prattling and exclamations of surprise and her merry ringing laughter were quite improper for a little lady of the nobility. But my lord the Duke was mightily amused by it all. He said his little daughter's amazement was a far more interesting sight to him than all the king's tournaments; and many of his noble friends said so too.

When Constance reached the beautiful field, she found there was still a great deal more to delight her. Such wonderful things as she saw, — magnificent tents decked and hung in golden tapestries, and gorgeous banners waving overhead, and golden statues of lions and other monstrous creatures which she admired greatly, and fountains that ran wine as freely as water, and sparkled like rubies in the sunlight. Then there were horses without number, — strong, handsome horses, splendidly caparisoned and wearing crests of tall white plumes on their proud heads; and their riders were clad from head to foot in bright armor, and carried long spears that flashed and glittered so that the scene was dazzling to the eyes. Indeed, there seemed to be no end of pomp and glory; and Constance felt that this was certainly

the grandest spectacle she had ever looked upon. She had never supposed there were so many people in the world, and such amiable and courtly people too; for every one had a smile for the pretty bright-haired child who went about hand in hand so confidingly with the grim and redoubtable Duke William.

On the day after the arrival Constance went with her father to visit the tents of some great lords whose names she could not remember, they were so long and strange; and the flattering remarks which her beauty and winning ways called forth on every side were as music to the vain old ears of my lord. He had never been admired by any one himself, and he knew it. He had always before hated those who were, and shown his envy in some unpleasant way. But with this child it was different. She was a part of himself, and he felt that all her charms and graces were but a reflection of his own greatness, and a thing to be proud of and to glory in. Some of these great people actually said she was a rival for the pretty queen herself, and better fitted to grace the court of France than the bare rocks of Mount St. Michael; at which Duke William smiled pleasurably, and his ambitions rose high.

But her little ladyship, who happily was ignorant

of all ambition, and still more unconscious of all her attractions, spoke up with her usual artless daring, —

"But I shall never leave Mount St. Michael, except with —"

"Except with whom?" demanded my lord.

"Except with some one I love very, very much," answered she, looking up at him with a bright, mischievous little smile.

And my lord, thinking she meant him, was pleased that his great friends should see how perfectly she loved and trusted him. He had had little enough love and trust to boast of, forsooth, and hers was now the sweetest thing in life to him.

On the next day the games began; and Constance was installed in one of the airy pavilions, in the midst of a group of fair ladies, beautifully dressed in light silken robes, with dainty laces about their shoulders, and roses blooming freely upon their cheeks. Nurse Lasette stood near by, and when my lady saw something that particularly astonished her, or when her little feelings became too much for her, she would draw Lasette's face down to hers and whisper in her ear, "Oh, Nurse, if Sweet William could but see all this!"

Constance soon noticed that many brave and handsome knights hovered continually about their pavilion. It is a curious thing, but one may nearly

always see brave young knights wherever there are lovely ladies. Constance did not yet know this great law of attraction; so she watched them all with deep interest, and amused her nurse with her comments.

"The ladies must love the brave knights very much, to give them such beautiful knots of ribbon," said she; "and look! some of them are throwing down flowers. Why do not the young lords kiss the pretty ladies for their pains, Lasette?"

But Lasette was at a loss to say why the young noblemen should prove themselves so thoughtless and ungrateful.

Presently my lady was interrupted in her ingenuous reflections. A young knight stood beside one of the flower-decked pillars of their bower, and directed his glances so often towards the little figure in white that Constance began to notice him particularly. He was alone. He neither spoke with the fair ladies above him, nor received flowers and favors from their hands. He had an absent look in his eyes, except when he looked at Constance, and then she observed that he smiled a little. She thought him very handsome and manly. He wore such a beautiful cloak of crimson velvet, fastened on the shoulder with a large silver clasp. One end

of it was gracefully thrown back, and revealed a splendid girdle and sword-hilt all inlaid with precious stones. She liked his face, too, — for it was a pleasant face, fairer than that of most men, — while his hair was almost as yellow as her own.

"I wonder what lady he is looking for," she mused, as she studied him with her wide-awake blue eyes. But as she was unable to satisfy herself on this point, she soon became interested in some of the lively combats that were going on.

As for the young nobleman, he watched the games but little that day. Every now and then Constance found his eyes upon her, and after a little she began to think that he was looking for no less a lady than her little self. Whenever she broke out into some exclamation of delight, or clapped her little hands, or made some artless remark to her nurse, he watched her, following all her movements and smiling as if in sympathy with her enjoyment.

Many eyes watched the pretty child that day, but none so furtively as the young lord's; and many spoke of her that night, but the young nobleman did not, — he only took with him the memory of her bright young face, and spent a great portion of the night in thinking.

As for my lady, when she laid her tired little head

on her pillow that night, she wondered if she would wake in the morning and find it all a dream. Her thoughts wandered to the old fortress in Normandy, and it seemed years since she had left it. All that she had seen since then went through her mind in rapid succession; and lastly she thought of the great distance between her and the little cousin she loved, and but for that thought she felt this had been the happiest day of her life.

On the third day, and on all the days following, Constance went again with her nurse to the ladies' pavilion. Each day she saw the young lord standing alone near the same pillar, and looking at her with the same searching look in his blue eyes. At last one day he came and spoke with her, and asked her in a courtly way what she thought of the king's great tournament. He had a kindly voice as well as a pleasant face, and Constance was disposed to be very friendly with him. So she told him, in her quaint little way, how pleased and surprised she had been, and how like a great lady she felt, as she watched the brave way in which the young knights were disporting themselves in the lists.

"It is a noble sight," she said. "There is only one thing I miss, — just one thing."

"And what is that?" inquired her friend.

"How like a great lady she felt, as she watched the brave way in which the young knights were disporting themselves in the lists."

"There is not, in all this great assembly, a single face that resembles Sweet William's."

"Sweet William!" repeated the nobleman; "that is a dainty name enough. And, pray, who is Sweet William?"

"My cousin, — my little twin-cousin who lives in the Great Tower at Mount St. Michael. I am so fond of him, and he is fond of me. I think of him all the time, even while I am seeing such great and curious sights as these; and I wish that he were with me. It was such a pity to come away and leave him shut up in that Great Tower — But there! I have again forgotten," she added hastily. "Nurse told me never to speak of Sweet William to any one; but she said 'to any one at Mount St. Michael,' and you are not of Mount St. Michael, so it is no great wrong."

The young lord looked surprised, but after a pause he said, —

"It is no wrong at all. I am not of Mount St. Michael, but of Chalons. I am the Count Philippe of Chalons, and I have never been in Normandy. But I had a sister once who was there, — a sweet and beautiful lady," he said. And as he looked more intently at the little girl, he added under his breath, "And you are wonderfully like her, — wonderfully like her!"

Their thoughts were travelling in different directions; and while the Count stood musing, Constance pursued her own without interruption.

"If you think there is no wrong," she said, "I will tell you all about my cousin Sweet William." And she laid her hand on his arm with a confiding little gesture, and an air of secrecy that was quite captivating. "I love to speak of him, though I seldom do to any one but Nurse. He is the dearest cousin in all the world, and so beautiful! I think you have never seen any one quite so beautiful as Sweet William. His name is Sweet William, but I call him Prince William sometimes. In truth, he is more like a prince than any of these noble lords." And she emphasized her ruthless assertion by a wave of her little arm that took in the entire assembly. "Do you know, I often wonder how Sweet William will look when he too is a great lord."

"That is a serious question," said the Count, laughingly.

"He will not look like you," she added, eying him critically; "for his curls are very brown, and his eyes are big and dark. Sometimes you would almost think they had tears in them, they shine so. But his sweet mouth tells you they have not. Sweet William is always smiling. I have never seen him weep, and

I think he never does. He is so very good, I am sure he has no reason to shed tears over his sins, as I have."

Count Philippe smiled involuntarily; but he was fain to check himself with speed, for my little lady was quite serious.

"And you say this lovely Sweet William is shut up in a great tower?" he asked.

"Yes; but he is quite happy, for he has his good nurse always with him. He is only quiet and thoughtful, and his cheeks are not so rosy as mine. I think it is because he *wonders* a great deal. We are very different, — Sweet William and I. Nurse calls us the Shadow and the Sunshine."

The young Count thought what a pleasant picture to see the two beautiful children together, — the sprightly, elf-like little maid and the gentle, winsome boy. There was something singularly attractive about Constance, and his interest grew deeper every moment. Without wishing to seem curious, he felt a desire to know more of this little twin-cousin in the tower, and to look into the strange mystery; for a mystery he was sure there was.

"And what has Sweet William done that he should be put in a tower?" he inquired.

"I do not know; no one knows," replied Constance,

artlessly; and she was a little puzzled because the Count Philippe looked incredulous. She was quite sure, however, that Sweet William had never done any wrong, and she told the young Count so. She believed in her little cousin so thoroughly, she trusted him so implicitly, that she felt some anxiety lest any one might form wrong impressions of him. They were all waiting, she said, — waiting and hoping; and some day something would happen — she did not know exactly what — that would give Sweet William leave to go from the Great Tower; and then they would all live happily at the castle. Constance thought this "something" must happen very soon now, for she had been waiting nearly a year.

"And Sweet William," she added, "has been waiting ever since he was a baby. That is nearly nine years ago. Sweet William and I were babes together then."

And, pray, what was the good Lasette doing while all this was going on? She must surely have fallen asleep, or been too rapt in the marvels that greeted her honest eyes; for never before had she watched so ill over her fair young charge. True, something unusual had just occurred. The young king of France had engaged in a playful hand-to-hand encounter, and come off victorious. Every one had been intensely

interested, but my lady and her friend the Count. But now the mad applause that rang through the crowd, and the great commotion that was made, put an end to any further conversation between them that day.

After that my lady and the Count grew very intimate. They saw each other every day at the games, and Constance went with him to see his beautiful charger, — he having heard of her fondness for horses, and all about the favorite Roncesvalles, and indeed about everything at Mount St. Michael that she thought might interest him. Count Philippe spent little of his time in the gay society of the lords and ladies of the court. He seemed quite content to be with little Constance. Every day he grew more and more attracted to her; and every night, as he stood alone in his chamber, he grew more and more puzzled by his own reflections.

At last the great tournament came to an end, and many of the noble guests were leaving reluctantly the scene of all these splendid festivities; but Count Philippe seemed more reluctant than the rest, and he lingered on as long as Duke William of Normandy and his little daughter were to be seen about the pleasant valley. One day, when he had not seen them at all, he went to his tent in the evening feeling very

lonely and dispirited. He sat thinking a long time, — thinking of the days when he too was a little child like my lady's cousin Sweet William, and when he loved a little girl almost as fair as my lady herself. And he grew so sad thinking about these things that he was fain to draw from his breast a little locket, the sight of which seemed to comfort him very much. It was a locket brought to him years ago by a poor sailor, the only living soul saved from a terrible wreck. There was a pretty face in the locket, and the Count looked at it long and earnestly.

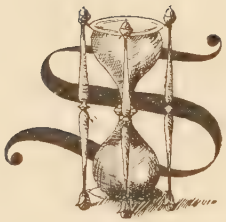
"You are wonderfully like her, — wonderfully like her!" he repeated, half aloud.

Then he kissed the sweet face tenderly, and was about to restore the locket to its place, when it slipped from between his fingers and fell to the floor. As it did so, a hidden spring flew open, and something fell out from the back of the little locket, — a slip of paper, worn and creased, with only a few dim words written upon it. Count Philippe had never seen it before. He took it up, and read it a great many times over, I think; for the few hurried words could not have held him there so long in silence. Then little by little the mystery became clearer, and suddenly a fearful truth flashed upon him like daylight. He sprang to his feet. What could he do? Nothing, then; for

the night was already far spent. He would have need to wait till the morning. Then he would see the little girl once more; he would speak with her nurse, and learn more of this little child in the Great Tower.

But at that very hour my Lady Constance and her nurse and all of Duke William's company were once more on the gallant ship; and while Count Philippe was spending his night hours walking restlessly about his chamber, and his feverish brain was at work over his strange discovery, her little ladyship was sleeping tranquilly, as every wave bore her nearer and nearer to the old fortress-home in Normandy.

CHAPTER XIII.



OME nine or ten years before, when Count Philippe was but a very young knight indeed, he had met with a great sorrow. He had loved a lady very much, and another knight scarcely older than himself had come and taken her away. That lady was his sister. He thought at first he could never bear to part with her. They had played together as children, and grown together out of childhood, and never been separated an hour until that luckless day when this gallant courtier had come and married her. It was true the young husband was good and brave and handsome, and the lady loved him very much, and was willing to go anywhere in the world with him; but this last thought was scarcely a comforting one to the young Philippe. I cannot tell you how much he missed his sweet sister. Only brothers who have loved and lost their dear

sisters can know what a sad thing it is. After she had gone, he spent much of his time in writing long letters to her, which she rarely received, and which she as rarely replied to, — for in those early days young ladies, though lovely and accomplished in many ways, were not as well versed in the art of letter-writing as they are now; and besides, travelling then was so uncertain that sometimes it was years before families that were separated had any news of one another.

So time went on without Count Philippe's ever hearing a word of his dear companion; and he was just beginning to be reconciled to her absence when a terrible thing happened.

A Norman vessel bound for France was wrecked in a fearful tempest, and every soul on board perished but one poor sailor. That sailor would rather have died a thousand times than have been the one left to tell the dismal story; yet he alone was spared. A fair lady had been intrusted to his care by some good and faithful Normans; and when the storm was raging highest, and the ship was sinking fast, and the voices of a hundred human souls rose up in agony, he had heard no voice but hers, and had tried to save her alone. For some hours he swam bravely bearing her in his arms, and clinging to the end of a broken oar

that supported them; but at length the poor lady grew so weak and exhausted and chilled with the cold that she was very faint, and knew she could not live much longer.

"My good friend," she whispered faintly, giving him something which she held fast in her hand, "I have not strength to live. If you reach the land, in Heaven's name find my brother Philippe of Chalons, and give him this; it will tell him all. The good God keep you!" And she sank to the bottom.

The sailor was rescued by some good fishermen, and in the early morning he reached the land in safety; and never a day nor a night did he rest till he had found the Count Philippe, and given him the little locket, and told him the fate of his beloved sister. And from that day the faithful Norman had wandered about homeless and friendless, never again serving on the treacherous sea nor daring to show his face in Normandy.

Many and many a time had Count Philippe looked at the dear face in the little locket, and kissed it lovingly; but never before had he known that through all these long years his sister's dying message to him lay hidden away there unheeded. And now, when his sorrow was almost sleeping, a light broke in upon him in the person of a sunny-haired little girl, whose

love for her dear cousin had reminded him of his own happy childhood. By some singular fancy he thought he saw a resemblance between her and the little sister he had loved long ago. He had seen it that first day at the games, — in her little dimpled smiles, in the blue depth of her eyes, in her waving golden hair; and the thought had grown so strong that it haunted him day and night. Every day had brought something that seemed to confirm his conjectures about her, and every night he had resolved to lose no more time in waiting, but speak out all that was in his mind. And yet in some unaccountable way the days had come and gone, and the bright little apparition with them; and now the truth was revealed to him when it was too late. He had made a discovery which sent the hot blood rushing to his brain with anger and indignation one moment, and tortured him with fearful doubts the next. The mystery he had thought solved at first, now grew more and more intricate. The words on the little slip of paper in the locket said, "My little child is a prisoner in the Great Tower. Oh, Philippe, save —" And the rest was so dim and blurred that he could read no more. The little boy in the tower must be his sister's child; and yet Constance was so like the lady in the locket he would have sworn they belonged to each other. There

was a dreadful mystery; he knew it, and he was the one appointed to clear it, not only from choice, but from duty.

Like an energetic young nobleman as he was, Count Philippe lost no more time in meditation. He set out to find the good mariner who had brought him the locket, and on whom he had never laid eyes again. It seemed a weary task, and almost a hopeless one at times; and it took so many days and weeks that the young Count grew discouraged more than once. But there is a gracious Providence that brings about even things which seem impossible in a most astonishing way. Quite unexpectedly, and after what appeared to Count Philippe a weary time to wait, the good sailor was found and made to relate all that he knew of the story of Mount St. Michael. It was a long narrative, often broken by sighs from the honest lips that told it; for the Norman sailor remembered it all as if it had been yesterday. It was not until then that the young Count learned all that had really happened to his dear sister, — all the grief she had had, and what she had suffered at the hands of the cruel Duke William. It was then he learned the fate of the little child who had been wronged to satisfy the cravings of a wicked revenge. Oh, if he had known it all, what a deal of suffering might have been spared to many innocent

hearts! Would not the years and best efforts of his early manhood have been spent in righting this great wrong!

But the good sailor had never dreamed that the little locket would remain unopened for nine long years. Indeed, he had thought more than once that save for the loss of their beloved lady, peace and contentment must long ere this have been restored at Mount St. Michael. He had often wondered what had been the fate of the implacable old Duke when found out by the young Count in all his wickedness. He had hoped, too, that some time the good Normans would forgive their poor countryman for having so ill piloted his fair charge, and bid him return home again and be happy. And he had waited wearily, and like many others, he had waited in vain. Never a word had come to him concerning what had happened at Mount St. Michael. Never had he seen the young Count since that first day until now; and the strange discovery fell upon him with the same sad force. Both felt it was the workings of a mysterious Providence which neither of them could understand. It was with this as with so much that happens in this world. A very little knowledge would have prevented it all; but on that little hung the scourge of a great evil. For

even the evil in this world tends to some good end; and this one was designed to teach a great lesson. Although the burden of it fell upon an innocent and helpless child, he was to be the unconscious instrument of a just and merited retribution.

The young Count and the sailor talked and worked together for many days, and at last it was arranged that they should set out for Mount St. Michael, and that Count Philippe should there demand his sister's child of the Duke of Normandy. It was done so quietly that no one knew of their intention; and even while the two were journeying towards the old Norman castle, Sweet William and my Lady Constance were again in the Great Tower together, enjoying the peaceful evening hours as of old, while William heard of, and my lady re-lived many times over, the delightful days at the great tournament.

And my lord, little dreaming of the startling announcement about to be made to him, was also enjoying a few peaceful and quiet days, and basking in the splendor of his own greatness. It would have been hard enough for him to be found out in all his sinfulness, to be thwarted in his revengeful purpose, to be baffled in his ambition. But something far worse than all this was in store for him. A chord

in his cold nature, never touched before, was soon to be rudely awakened. He had never loved much; yet through his love he was to suffer more than from any of the defeats and disappointments of former years. The cloud that hung over Mount St. Michael for so many years was to be dispelled, and many hearts to be lightened of their anxious burden. No one suspected it, — not my lord, surely, who felt quite safe in his strong castle; nor the dear little captive, though the day of his happiness was dawning; nor yet the good nurses, who knew the whole mystery of the Great Tower but too well.

The story of Mount St. Michael was no longer a secret nor a mystery to one person, at least; for while they journeyed together towards Normandy, the sailor had said to the Count, —

"Your sister's child, my lord, was a little maid."

CHAPTER XIV.

COUNT PHILIPPE and his companion had travelled all night long, when at last the dense blackness melted into gray, and in the ghostly morning light Mount St. Michael and its grim old castle rose from the misty sea. Deep gloom reigned everywhere. It had steeped the lonely place in more than its usual loneliness. It clung to the barren coast wrapped in silvery vapors, to the gray towers and turrets still but faintly outlined against the leaden skies. Who would have guessed what a sweet vision of freshness and beauty lay hidden in the very highest of those frowning turrets? Like the gray old giant of the forest, sheltering its tender nursling in the lofty branch, as far as possible from earth, as near as may be to heaven; so Mount St. Michael held its treasure in its strong arms safe and close.

The boy William lay there sleeping, surely the fairest born in Normandy: a picture of warmth and color, more than enough to make up for the chill, colorless world outside, — color in the dark curls lying loosely on the white pillow, in the tender eyes now hidden by the beautiful eyelids and their fringe of soft black lashes. Who can tell what visions of freedom and happiness delight him now? And there is color not less beautiful on the softly rounded cheek glowing with the rosiness of healthful sleep, and in the sweet red lips, parted and half smiling, — at fortune, perhaps, who is to do such great things for him this day. Ah, Sweet William, lovely image of childish grace and innocence, sleep but this one hour more, and it shall be thy last in the great, dreary dungeon! To-day the sorrows of captivity are at an end for thee, and freedom no longer a vague dream, but a glorious reality!

It was very early, and others were asleep at Mount St. Michael besides the gentle William; but in less than an hour after, when it was known that two strangers had arrived at the castle, and that one of them was a young count from France, and the other a sailor whom every one had thought dead these many years, the whole household awoke as if by magic, and all was life and interest. The first of all the honest

hearts made glad by these tidings was that of the old Norman peasant when he welcomed back his loved one after all these years of patient waiting. It was through him that the news reached the castle-folk, for the poor old man could not contain his joy. Through him they learned that the Count Philippe was the brother of my lord Geoffrey's fair lady, and that he was come at last to claim his sister's little child. They heard how the ship in which she sailed away from Normandy had been wrecked. They heard the story of the little locket, how the paper in it had been found. They were told how much the little Lady Constance resembled her young uncle, and what a brave, good knight he was, and how he had met my lady at the tournament, and a great deal more; and the greatest excitement prevailed.

All that Duke William heard of these rumors, however, was that a young nobleman from the court of France awaited his pleasure; and as he did not suspect the nature of the young Count's visit, and was always glad to make a display before other noblemen, he prepared to give him a most courteous and splendid welcome.

Some hours later all of Duke William's retinue had assembled in the Great Hall of the castle. The nobles stood in two long lines on either side of my

lord, who sat at one end in his ducal chair, wearing a heavy crown of jewels, arrayed in silk and purple, and beaming down majestically upon every one. Constance sat on a little stool at his feet, with no more charming ornaments than her own bright smile and her crown of golden hair. A look of great expectancy stole into her big eyes. She had been silent for some little time, and was just preparing to begin a series of eager questions, when a movement was heard in the hall and the Count Philippe entered.

A cry of joyous recognition broke from my lady's lips. Disregarding all the rigid formality of such a ceremonial as this, she ran forward to meet him, exclaiming, —

"Oh, my lord, you have come all the way from France to see me!"

"All the way from France to see you, my Constance," repeated the young Count, tenderly, bending over her and putting his arm about her little figure as if he meant never to let her go again.

Every one looked surprised, — most of all, Duke William, whose expression of surprise was slightly mingled with displeasure; for he resented the young nobleman's familiarity with his little daughter. Count Philippe, still holding Constance by the hand, came forward, and knelt before the Duke to re-

ceive his greeting. Then he rose and looking about him with an air of brave assurance, made known his errand, speaking with gentle dignity; for he was a courteous as well as a brave and noble knight.

"My lord," said he, "I am here to undeceive you, for it is plain that you, too, are ignorant of the truth concerning this little lady. Constance is your brother Geoffrey's child and my sister's; and I have, by your gracious leave, come to take her back to her kindred. Your own son, William, is in yonder Great Tower, by what chance I know not; but it will doubtless please you to release him early, and deprive him no longer of a father's love."

A deep stillness fell over the assembled nobles. Duke William's face was ghastly white. His deep eyes gleamed fiercely, and his beetling brows were knit over them in wrath. Constance thought she had never seen my lord look so terrible, and for the first time in her life she shrank from him and was almost afraid.

"What madness is this?" he asked at length, in a voice that trembled with agitation.

Count Philippe drew forth the little locket containing his sister's face. It was the image of Constance. Then he laid the little message before him, and Duke William read the few dim words that

had been his undoing. He remained as one transfixed. All breathing was hushed, and the room was deathly still.

"And what," said he, after a fearful pause, "is all this about the Lady Constance and *my son William?* Speak!" he thundered.

The Count turned and beckoned to his companion, who was waiting without, saying, —

"This good man, my lord, whom you may remember as once a brave sailor of Normandy, will tell you better than I."

The old mariner then related how nine years ago my lord Geoffrey's fair lady had been taken to his grandfather's hut, and there awaited the ship that was to take her back to France, away from my lord's displeasure; and how she had wept at parting from her little child, and how she had spoken of it as her tender baby-daughter, and begged them to give it her own true name, Constance; and how she had said they must pray and hope and wait, and she would send her brother the Count to bring her little one back to her. Then he told of the frightful storm and of her death; and there was not an eye but was dim, save that of Duke William. And lastly he told of the strange misunderstanding about the locket, and the finding of the little paper at last, and the young

Count's search for him, and indeed all that had happened since. All this he told, and could vouch for its truth. But how it happened that after these nine years he had come back and found this same little daughter as happy and free as a bird at Mount St. Michael, and had heard of another child of the name of William who was in the Great Tower instead, he really could not say.

"Mayhap the good nurses Mathilde and Lasette, who did attend the little ones, may know more of this than any one else."

Duke William's face had not changed a muscle during the whole of the sailor's narrative; but at these closing words a sudden fear overtook him, and one could see that a terrible struggle was going on within him. His hand trembled visibly, and a cold moisture beaded his dark brow.

"Bring," said he, to one of his attendants, —"bring hither the two women and — and the child from the tower!"

A dreadful stillness followed this command, and for many long minutes no sound was heard in the Great Hall but the quick and fitful breathing of my lord, while his heart beat so fiercely that he thought it must be freeing itself from his breast. He sat motionless and deadly pale, gazing fixedly at the portrait of

the beautiful lady, that hung on the opposite wall; and unconsciously every eye followed his.

Presently the great door swung open, and a little figure appeared from behind the parted tapestries, — a lithe and graceful figure, straight and slender as a young oak, — and the next moment Sweet William stood before the Duke! His young head was thrown back, and his curls hung in rich, loose rings about his shoulders. He looked up, and his eyes were innocently fearless; they were dark, luminous eyes, like those in the portrait. His face was fair and delicate, but it was strong in its angelic purity. And as he stood there alone in the face of so many strange people, with the same look of sweet, unconscious dignity on his childish countenance, a murmur of admiration ran through the astonished crowd. The instant Duke William laid his eyes upon him, he felt himself grow weak and powerless. There was no mistake; Sweet William wore, indeed, his mother's look, and he saw reflected in every feature of the beautiful child the face of his young wife, her tender smile, and the earnest, trustful look that had won his cold heart to her.

Then the good nurse Mathilde, who had followed him, threw herself upon her knees, — not before the mighty Duke of Normandy, whose anger she no

longer dreaded, but before Sweet William, her brave beautiful darling, for whose love she would have given her life. She spoke to him alone, and begged his forgiveness alone, when she told him how on that dreadful night she and Lasette had looked at the twin-babes sleeping in the little white cradle, and thought to keep the tender girl, their beloved Geoffrey's babe, safely at the castle as my lord's child, and to send his own son William to the dingy tower instead. They feared lest this boy might grow up like his father, cruel and heartless; and they thought the Great Tower a more fitting place for him than for a helpless little maid. They dreaded, as they had good cause to do, a son of my lord; and yet, as the good Mathilde had carried him in her arms to the dreary tower that night, — then but an innocent and harmless babe, — she had felt her heart full of pity for him, and had wept bitterly her own share in his sad fortunes.

But Sweet William had inherited not only the beautiful face, but also the gentle spirit of the fair young mother who had faded at his birth; and, contrary to all their fearful expectations, he had grown up the dearest and loveliest boy in all Normandy, and Mathilde loved him with all her heart. They had kept their secret bravely, she and Lasette, even from the old keeper, who had shared Sweet William's love;

"A little figure appeared from behind the parted tapestries."

and they had prayed and trusted earnestly that the good God would forgive them and right their wrong, and in His own good time restore the little one to his liberty; and now that this time had come, and some one was near to protect the little Constance, Mathilde felt that she was ready to die for her darling's happiness.

What a terrible blow was this to the proud old Duke, to see his own wicked and cruel deeds turned back upon himself, — to find that the sorrow he had caused for those he should have loved was now his own! He was so stricken down by the suddenness of these astounding truths that he had not strength enough left to be angry, not even with those who had brought this grief upon him; nor had he a wish nor a thought to punish them. Something stronger even than anger was laying hold of his heart. It was remorse for the evil he had done, but still more for the evil he had meditated. He recalled with a shudder the many, many times he had been tempted to take this child's life, — this fair, lovable William, his own flesh and blood, the son he had so often wished! But God is merciful even to the ungodly, and Duke William had been stayed, and his hand mysteriously withheld from committing so frightful a sin. And though he never fully knew it, his son had been an

unusually favored and contented little captive, and had been spared all the real misery that was destined for him.

And his beloved Constance, — his no longer, — the true object of all his fear and hatred, — he had learned to love her as he had never loved any one or anything in all his life before. Now that this love was about to be taken from him, he felt how strong it was, how it rose above every other feeling in his heart, — even that of his bitter disappointment, and the indomitable envy which had ruled him all his life.

"Constance is free to go," he said in a strange, hoarse voice; and laying his hand on Sweet William's shoulder, he murmured brokenly, "My son! my son!"

But Constance sprang forward, her little heart overflowing with love and compassion.

"Never without you!" she cried, — "never without you, my dear, dear father! I know no father but you, and you shall always be mine as well as Sweet William's." And she threw her arms about his neck in her fond and loving way.

This perfect childish trust, this undeserved love, so beautiful and true now in his hour of greatest need, completely disarmed my lord. For a moment it seemed as if great tears stood in his eyes. Every one was moved; even those who had hated him most were

touched at the pitiful sight of this wilful old man, so broken down and miserable in the face of a power mightier than he. Every one felt kindly towards him; for there is nothing like the sight of grief to make a noble heart forget its wrongs. The generous young Count and the tender-hearted William both forgave him; and when at last my lord rose to go, weak and overpowered, it was no other than Count Philippe and Sweet William who supported his unsteady steps to the door of the Great Hall.

When every one had gone, and Sweet William was left alone in the stately chamber with his nurse Mathilde, he stood once more before the lovely face that had so impressed him on his first visit to the great castle; and as he looked again at the portrait with the thought of this great new revelation stirring his young soul, a strange, sweet rapture filled him, and he murmured in his heart, "She was my mother!"

There was great rejoicing at Mount St. Michael that night. But what was to so many the reward of years of patient waiting was to Duke William a terrible punishment. It fell heavily upon him, — much more so than if he had been young and strong, instead of a broken down and wretched old man. The shock was too great for him; and that night he lay very ill on his bed, feeling that he had but little time

left in which to repent for the misdeeds of a long life. Until a late hour Sweet William and Constance stood on either side of him; and a look of quiet resignation, never worn in his life before, now rested on his face. He spoke lovingly to the little girl, more lovingly than he had ever done before he knew whose child she really was. But when he looked at William, his own sweet, comely boy, whom he might have known and loved these many years, his heart was full of yearning, and he longed to say something that would win the childish heart to him even at this late hour. For, oh! there is no more bitter sorrow, in all life's sorrows, than the knowledge that those we love most have suffered wrongs at our unconscious hands.

He drew Sweet William's young head down to his, and said in a voice that was broken and tremulous, —

"My child, my son, I have loved you always, but I did not know it. In my heart there was a place for you, but unknowingly I have kept you from it. Oh, forgive me! and Heaven forgive me, for I am in great need!" And he sank exhausted upon his couch.

At last he took a little hand in each of his own, and looked earnestly at the sweet and innocent faces of the two children; and as he did so, the last vestige of bitterness vanished out of his heart, and lo! the love that had so long been divided was united once more.

Oh, happy thought, that for one moment, even one short moment, his heart was moved to repentance, and that a life of selfish and wicked motives should close at last with only words of love! It was thus that in the best and humblest spirit he had ever known, the surly and dreaded William passed away to his rest.

CHAPTER XV.

T first Sweet William did not know himself in his new condition, for he had been proclaimed the Duke of Normandy in truth, and had been feasted and welcomed and cheered so heartily by all the good people of Normandy that he was quite bewildered. But otherwise Sweet William himself was unchanged by this great tide in his fortunes. He was still the same innocent little boy, with the wondering look in his great dark eyes, and the tender loving heart that endeared him to all. The story of his strange captivity was a revelation to many; but to William, who had lived in mystery all his days, and who had learned to accept unaccountable happenings with sweet, unquestioning submission, this new glory meant very little; and he remained quite undisturbed by it all. He was only a little sorry to leave the old gray tower, — the home that had been

made bright for him by love and kindness, — and very happy to live in the splendid castle, to go about freely with his dear cousin Constance, to play in the open fields, to enjoy the warm and beautiful sunlight, and to see so many good, kind people who always greeted him with smiles. It was like living in a new world, and a world that was always beautiful. For in these days every one was happy at Mount St. Michael; and save for my little lady, who very naturally mourned the death of Duke William, whom she still called her dear good father, every one was light-hearted, and felt that things had come to a happy close, and rejoiced that so much good had come out of so great an evil. But I think the one who rejoiced the most, and who gave the most fervent thanks to Heaven, was the good nurse Mathilde, who had tried in her honest heart to spare both the dear little ones from any suffering. All her anxious fears and misgivings of past years were forgotten in the assurance of her darling's love, and the knowledge that his noble and generous nature approved of all she had done. For when she related to him, over and over again, the secret that had lain hidden from him in her heart, and as often entreated him to forgive her, he had only embraced her lovingly and said, —

"Dear nurse, you have only taught my father to love

his brother's child, and to know his own before his death. If my living in the Great Tower has saved Constance from a day of unhappiness, then have you granted my dearest wish. I have been happy with you in the old place, Mathilde; and we love it, do we not?" And his little voice faltered, as it did many times afterward in remembering the scene of his strangely clouded childhood.

As for my lady Constance, when she realized all that had really happened, she was as much overcome by the thought of her little cousin's wrongs as by her own sorrow. For some singular reason she felt that all the blame rested upon her, — that she had caused him to suffer untold miseries; and when she was with him alone for the first time after he had risen to the exalted position of Duke of Normandy, she stood almost in awe of him, and felt he could never love her any more.

"Oh, William, Sweet William," she cried, "what a sinful child I have been! I have robbed you of all that was yours; but I did not know it, indeed I did not. Oh, pray, my lord, put me in the Great Tower now, if it will do any good!" And she fell on her knees at his feet quite stricken down by a sense of her deep guilt. She seemed for the moment to forget their long friendship, the great tie of love that bound them, —

everything except that he had suffered a great injury, and, in some way which she could not fully understand, for her sake.

But Sweet William, Heaven bless him! did not forget the light and the sunshine she had brought into his dingy home, the childish love she had so freely given him, the happy hours her presence had made for him; and of all the feelings that stirred his heart in these eventful days, none was so strong and so ardent as his love for Constance.

Dear children, there is no more precious thing on all God's earth than a loving and grateful heart, — a heart that can forget its own wrongs, but never the love and kindness it has received. Such a heart is the noblest gift a man can possess, — greater than beauty and wealth and talents, — and it makes more real happiness in this world than all of these put together. It is like a blessed sunbeam, casting its generous warmth on the good and evil alike, and leaving its precious influence everywhere; and if such a heart is that of a little child, it is all the more beautiful because of its youthful ardor and purity.

"Dear, dear Constance," Sweet William said, raising her tenderly and putting his arm about her with an air of sweet protection and the new look of dignity

that sat so well upon his youthful countenance, "we are cousins still, and we shall always be. No matter how far you may be from me, I shall always think of you and love you. And when I am a man, Constance, I will come for you, and we shall live again at Mount St. Michael." And although Constance had already learned to love her young uncle the Count, and the thought of going back to France with him was not unpleasant, she felt just at that moment that she would rather be a prisoner in the Great Tower all her life than be parted from her cousin Sweet William.

But Count Philippe, who was good and kind, and cared most for these dear children's happiness, had no thought of parting them; and some days later, when they were all three together, he said to Constance, —

"Ask your cousin William if he will go to France with us, in a great and splendid ship."

"To live with us," cried Constance, looking up eagerly, — "to be near me always?"

"Yes," said the Count, with a queer little smile, "always."

And Sweet William consented, saying he could think of nothing that would be more to his liking.

So for some weeks following, the two little cousins roamed about Mount St. Michael together, — he

"We are cousins still."

enjoying his new-found liberty and all the delights it brought, and she learning to forget her first childish sorrow. And this was all such a perfect realization of their bright dreams that very soon the little Constance forgot her loss, and was as happy again as any one at Mount St. Michael. And this you will think is saying much, when I tell you that there were some very happy people at the castle just then,—two in particular. And my story would not be complete if I omitted to say that these were old Guilbert and Nurse Mathilde, who were bidden to accompany their young lord to his new home in France. In the excitement of the prospective journey it is said that Mathilde quite lost her head, and actually consented to keep the promise she had made some time before, to become the good keeper's prisoner for life indeed; and what is still more remarkable is that she seemed immensely pleased at the idea; though I think they never again lived in a Great Tower, but spent the remainder of their honest lives in the faithful and pleasant service of their young master.

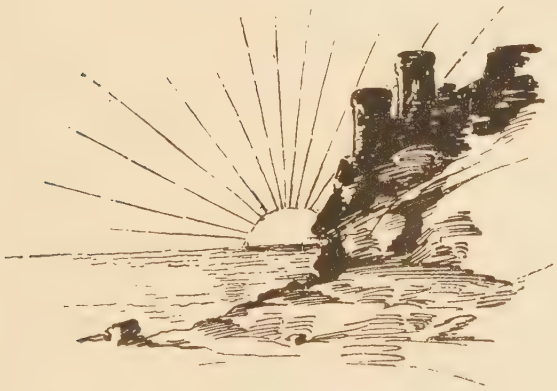
When at last the day of the departure arrived, and my lady had taken a tender leave of all her many friends at Mount St. Michael, not forgetting the noble Roncesvalles, promising to be true to him always and

to love him, the two children stood in the vast court-yard of the castle, whither all the good castle-folk and Normans of the village had assembled to bid their little lord God-speed. While the air still trembled with the loving clamor of his name, Sweet William stepped forward, holding his little cousin by the hand, and of his own free will, like a true and brave little nobleman that he was, addressed them in his clear childish voice, —

"My good friends," said he, "do not think we are leaving you for always, and do not grieve at our going. Constance and I will come again, — will we not, cousin? — to rule at Mount St. Michael, when I have learned in France how to be a good and brave Duke of Normandy."

And oh, the cheers that rang out after his young lordship's sweet farewell! And how the walls of the old gray castle echoed and re-echoed with the joyous acclamations of the good people! And how they all followed the merry party down to the white shore, and waved their heartiest good-byes to the two happy children! It was then that another fair vessel left the shores of Normandy for Calais; and as it sailed out into the beautiful blue channel, and the glorious evening sunshine fell over it like a bless-

ing, none but kind and loving wishes followed after it, and all hearts were merry and glad. For this time no little cousin was left behind, nor was the face of Sweet William ever again seen watching and waiting from the window of the Great Tower on Mount St. Michael.



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